

There's a Crowd

by

William Caine

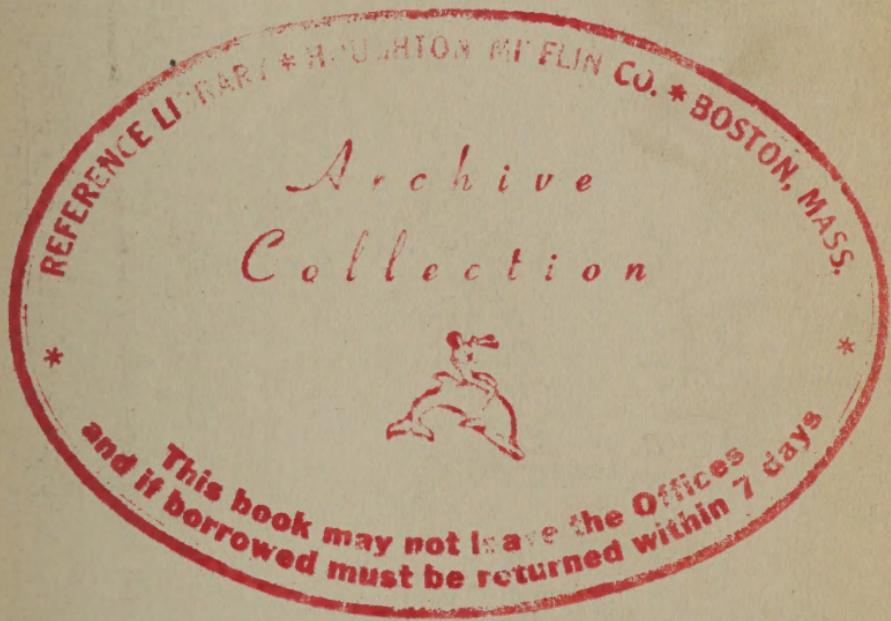
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An Anglo-American Comedy

BY

William Caine



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*To the dearest and wisest of
little mothers-in-law
gratefully*

THREE'S A CROWD

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CHAPTER I

(1)

MRS. MARCH and her daughter Hilda had been informed that Mrs. Brackett would be with them in one moment, and this moment they were employing in the consideration of Doll's portraits. Until now they had seen nothing but the picture which George and Doll had sent with their letters from Oberammergau. Here, in Mrs. Brackett's suite at the Savoy Hotel, they had large opportunity for improving their knowledge of the girl's appearance. In the room there were, great and small, eight photographs of her. She was to be seen equipped for dancing, walking, dining, bathing, riding, motoring, being presented at Court; as a baby, as a child, as a girl, and as a young woman; looking down, looking up, looking sideways; with a fan, with a bouquet, with a horse, with her mother. No one who should so much as glance round this small reception-room could fail to perceive the importance of Doll. Of course Mrs. March and Hilda were already quite alive to Doll's importance, though perhaps not in the same way as was Mrs. Brackett. They thought of her as George's future wife, which Mrs. Brackett could never have done. Mrs. Brackett thought of George as Doll's future husband, a feat impossible to Mrs. March and Hilda.

"She is really very pretty," said Hilda with a certain reluctance as she put a large photograph back on the piano. "But, of course, George could never marry a plain girl." She thought she was complimenting her brother.

"No," said Mrs. March, "George could never marry a plain girl. Naturally."

"I only hope that she's not a fool," said Hilda as she took up another photograph.

"Hush!" said Mrs. March, lowering her voice and glancing apprehensively towards the door through which Mrs. Brackett would soon appear. "George," she added, "could never marry a fool. George is not the man to be carried away by a pretty face."

"Pretty faces," said Hilda, "carry away a lot of men that have always been supposed to be sensible. Doll sounds foolish, too. Why can't she call herself Dolly like other people?"

"We can trust George," Mrs. March announced. She spoke with absolute conviction.

"I hope so," said her daughter, "but I shan't be happy till I've talked with this Doll of his. Her letter to you was nice, though. I'll say that much for her."

"Yes," said Mrs. March, "she evidently understands how lucky she is." Then she caused a smile to appear upon her face and rose to her feet, for the door through which they expected Mrs. Brackett to come had begun to open.

Sure enough Mrs. Brackett came through it. She was a tiny, fair woman, slightly made up, and she wore a black gown and white collar and cuffs, all in the latest fashion for widows. I suppose she came up to the shoulders of big Mrs. March and Hilda.

She advanced quickly with extended hands.

"Mrs. March, Miss March," she said, giving the name of her guests that emphasis and significance of which Americans alone have the secret — "Or may I say Hilda?"

"Please do," said Hilda amiably as she tried to disengage her right hand from the firm grip of Mrs. Brackett's left. She failed (her mother was having similar trouble with Mrs. Brackett's right hand), and the three ladies, for several seconds, formed a group — Mrs. Brackett its small central figure — from which a sculptor might have received inspiration for a statue to be called "The Oath of the Feminists."

From Mrs. March to Hilda and from Hilda back to Mrs. March did Mrs. Brackett smile as she pressed their hands vigorously in her own and permitted happy tears to threaten to overflow upon her complexion. Then with a little sigh, suggestive of complete satisfaction, she threw the hands from her and turned quickly away, drying her eyes delicately with a trifle of lace and cambric which she pulled out of her belt.

"Sit down," she said, "sit down. Doll will be in presently. I sent her off in a car with George to see Richmond Park, right after breakfast. I was a bit tired myself with last night's journey from Paris, and stayed here to write some letters. Of course Doll slept all the way, except when we took the steamer at Calais and left it at Dover. She got here as fresh as could be. Her vitality is so wonderful. You can't tire my girl, Mrs. March. I always insist on her having an automobile ride every day, and as you were coming to lunch, and as the paper says it may turn to rain later, and as George said you could n't

possibly be here before one o'clock, if you came on the train he told you to take, I just risked her not being with me to receive you. I do hope you'll forgive us; but with me it's Doll's health first of all, always."

Mrs. March and Hilda murmured suitable things and Mrs. Brackett pursued her observations.

"This is a beautiful moment, Mrs. March, in which we two mothers meet," she said in a voice that vibrated with warm feeling. "The mother of George! The mother of Doll! How much we shall have to say to each other!"

"I expect so," said Mrs. March dubiously. The poor lady had never learned to be comfortable in emotional situations.

Mrs. Brackett had.

"You and I," she said, "have loved. You and I understand what this means to my darling Doll. You too have given life. You understand what it means to me."

"Yes," said Mrs. March, "of course. Certainly."

Hilda wondered if Mrs. Brackett was in any danger of understanding what it meant to them and very nearly said so; but she was a wise girl and held her tongue.

"And you, Miss March — Hilda," the little woman went on. "You are at the beginning of your life, like Doll. You will have had — are still having your dreams. You can realise a little what it must be to Doll to —"

"Of course," said Hilda. "I'm so glad you like George so much."

"Your brother," said Mrs. Brackett, "is a very dear fellow. He has sworn to me that he will make Doll happy. Let him do that, and I believe I shall be able to forgive him — for what he is doing to *me*. Yes, I certainly shall

love George — for Doll's sake. And so you want us to come down to your country home. It's just too dear of you."

"But of course you must come," said Mrs. March. "The only question is, how soon?"

"The answer is," said Mrs. Brackett with enthusiasm, "the very first possible moment." She stretched out a sudden hand, and pressed the hand of Mrs. March where it lay on her knee. "Dear Mrs. March," she said, "this is such a pleasure. Dear Hilda," and she pressed Hilda's hand also. She made a little satisfied sound twice, "M-m! M-m!" and smiled upon them with affectionate eyes. "I must be very fond of you two," she explained. "You are going to bulk so largely in my Doll's future life. When I am over there in America — Ah!" She pressed the handkerchief to her lips and turned her head away.

"Quite so," said Mrs. March sympathetically.

Mrs. Brackett rose suddenly. "Here she is!" she exclaimed joyfully and, with one swift movement, tucked the handkerchief back in her belt.

"Yes," said Hilda, "here they are!"

(2)

Doll framed herself in the doorway for a moment, George looming behind her, a devoted figure burdened with rugs, flowers, three parcels (which looked like a novel, a box of chocolates, and something out of a draper's shop), and finally two pairs of goggles.

Doll wore a long motoring-coat and a closely fitting hat, both of very thin, dull black leather. In the hat was a flat, cherry-coloured cockade and the coat was fastened

with two big buttons of the same hue. It was a simple enough scheme of colour, but an artist had arranged it.

She was about five feet nine inches high and admirably developed. Her mother had been right about her vitality, which declared itself instantly in the superb carriage of her head, the fine poise of her body, the clear cream and roses of her cheeks. The Earth was this tall girl's foot-stool; Humanity had been created to admire her. Though she was, without a doubt, posing in her doorway, it seemed that she did so less for the sake of herself than for that of other people. The flattery of all the eyes that had ever fallen upon her had not turned her head; she had simply become immune to the dangers of it. It did not trouble her; it did not bore her. It was a part of her existence like the breath of her body. She expected it, and provided for it unconsciously. If she had not received it she would have been as astounded as if her hands should have suddenly refused to do the few things that were required of them.

For if the truth is to be told about them, these same hands of hers were very small and soft; very useless-looking little things. It seemed as if they could never have been tried upon work harder than manicuring themselves to pass a daily hour or two.

Her hair was of a gold so fine as to suggest a metal etherealised, purged of all earthly impurities and quite above the desire of the hearts of men. Of such might the New Jerusalem be builded. And this hair was very abundant.

Her eyes were of that tender blue that clothes far distant islands upon a summer sea.

Her brows and lashes were dark — darkened Hilda

thought, quite unjustly. But Hilda had not been deceived by Mrs. Brackett's complexion.

It would be stupid to prolong this catalogue of exquisite things. It was stupid, perhaps, to begin it. One may not hope to capture beauty with words. All those fine things that have been written by all those great people about all those lovely women succeed only in convincing us of the ability or genius of the writers. These can make wonderful sentences; they may not remake their wonderful women. All they can do is to give us more or less wonderful materials from which we may construct our own images. There are not two people living who possess the same picture of any woman of whom they have only read. No, not though they have seen her with their own eyes shall this thing come to pass. For beauty is a possession that each has for himself, in high and low degree, and one man may gain a heavenly vision where another sees nothing but the sun setting dismally through filthy rain beyond a dirty Lancashire mill-town.

Yet, now that our catalogue is begun, it may as well be ended, lest you should think me afraid of the remaining items. Believe me, I am nothing of the kind. Straight nose, red mouth, even teeth, round chin, not one of them failed the girl. The throat was long and strong; the ears small and charmingly made. Her figure was divine; her legs and arms in excellent proportion.

I confess that it is a matter of great delight to me to be concerned with a person of so many perfections. I hate half measures, though they have unfortunately often to be taken. When they have not I see no reason for neglecting to congratulate myself.

(3)

By the time this admirable vision left its frame, Mrs. March and Hilda were both halfway across the room to meet it. They had no effects to produce, because neither of them was conspicuously handsome, and both were eager to welcome the girl that was to be George's wife. They had travelled from Brockenhurst to London that morning to do this very thing, and when the opportunity for doing it at last came, they did not hesitate about seizing it.

Thus it came to pass that they had walked at least a yard and a half farther than had Doll when at last they all came together. Neither of them knew it; and I doubt if Doll did, but Doll would have known if the thing had not happened.

Having had her due, she rewarded the devout with smiles, handshakes, kisses, by Heaven! Yes, Mrs. March and Hilda were kissed kindly and liked it. They felt as if something very wonderful had happened to them. It must have been Doll's eyes, close to theirs, as she did it. They fell back into their places, forgetting all about George, if you will believe me.

Doll put a hand up and unfastened a leather button. "George," she said, "pull this old coat off."

George advanced but Mrs. Brackett waved him back.

"No, George," she said, almost harshly. "This is for me to do. Don't you see your mother and sister?" She planted herself squarely before her child, unbuttoned the coat with hands that lingered on each button, and helped the girl to take it off with a solicitude that is generally seen only in cloak-room attendants with sables to guard.

Then she smoothed and pulled out to its best advantage the dress which was disclosed, tucked away a curl which offended, unbuttoned the gloves and drew them off the hands which Doll held out to her, blew into them, folded them and put them on the table. Then she rang the bell for luncheon.

Now there came in a young American man called Otis Gardner, the son of a lifelong friend of Doll's mother, himself a lifelong friend of Doll's: a well-dressed, well-mannered fellow, healthy, good-enough-looking. He too was staying at the Savoy. Doll had encountered him a moment ago downstairs in the hall, had announced the engagement of George and herself, and had bidden him to lunch, to make George's acquaintance, a thing which she assumed he would certainly wish to do, because he, Otis, had once asked her, Doll, to marry him. Whether Otis did or did not wish to know George does n't matter. He made it appear as if he did; but I have said that he had good manners. George did not know that Otis had once asked Doll to marry him, so what George thought about him does n't matter either. Downstairs, however, he had found this American agreeable, like other Americans that he had met, and now he thought little more than that about him. He was vastly welcome to lunch with them, this old family friend of Doll's. If it pleased Doll to have him, that was the only thing that mattered.

They all sat down and began to talk. Mrs. Brackett took a high chair. She was one of those wiry little women who are constitutionally unable to lounge. Mrs. March and Hilda accommodated themselves a little more luxuriously on the sofa. George and Otis Gardner took the first seats that they found. As for Doll, she had sunk into the

largest, easiest, and most becoming chair in the room. Again she was framed.

And now Mrs. March and Hilda wanted to know all about it and exactly how it happened. The letters they had received had not been nearly full enough. A month ago, Hilda said, George in one of his short and stupid notes had mentioned that he had made the acquaintance at Munich of a Mrs. and Miss Brackett, Americans, and that he had taken them to see the Rubens pictures one morning and had given them lunch afterwards at the Törbelstube and was going to guide them to Konradshöhe on the following day to show them the view of the Bavarian Alps. Since then a few scrappy postcards had arrived from him, written in various villages of those same Alps, but there had not been a word to show that his acquaintance with these Bracketts had not come to an end in Munich. At length, out of a clear sky, two letters from Oberammergau had announced the wonderful news.

And now, here they were and what had they to say for themselves?

"Well —" began Mrs. Brackett; but Doll held up a hand.

"Don't *you* want to tell it, George?" she said to George. "Yes, you tell it. I'm a nervous wreck from driving two hours on the wrong side of these streets or I'd do it. But really, Mrs. March, George knows more about it than any one else, because it was his idea from the first, and of course I was quite unaware of what was going on till the final scene. George is the real authority on this affair. But some day you and Hilda must get hold of mother quietly and she'll give you her point of view. Not while George is there, though. Mother's very cross

with George, are n't you, mother? Go right ahead, George. We're all listening to you. Pull your chair closer, Otis. Now, then, George. 'It was a still wonderful moonlight night in the lounge of the Hotel Regina, in Munich.' Continue, George."

Thereupon George endeavoured to be lively and amusing about the steps which had led up to the engagement; but he was not very successful. He suffered from nervousness because of the presence of Otis Gardner and because Hilda's face was not entirely as he could have wished it. He wanted Hilda and Doll to be 'real sisters' to one another. Doll, he knew, would do her best; but one was never quite sure of Hilda. A queer girl, sometimes, Hilda. A bit capricious in her likes and dislikes. She had by no means always approved of his friends, men or girls, and when they had failed to please her she had never hesitated to show it. She was always a little jealous of them. Well, perhaps it was natural. He and Hilda had been wonderfully good friends. He dared say that he would have been a little jealous of any man that had threatened to monopolise Hilda. Of course that would n't be the case now. The best he could wish Hilda, now, would be what had happened to himself. No doubt some good fellow would appear one of these days and then what a welcome he, George, would give him! Yes, he thought Hilda might show herself a trifle more welcoming to Doll. But that would be all right as soon as she knew Doll properly. No one could resist Doll for any time at all.

While he thought these things, he was also indicating for his mother and sister the outlines of his courtship; the visit to Konradshöhe and the enthusiasm for the

Bavarian Hills which had overtaken Doll as she had stared out of Isar's green gorge, as through a doorway, at the line of faint snow-peaks; her decision to visit them, without delay. He confessed, simply enough, his satisfaction at this result of his scheming, for had he not already announced his intention of going into those hills in a day or two and was it not now easy to suggest that they should travel together as far, at least, as Partenkirchen? He recounted the subsequent travels of the three, their examination of the lakes, rivers, valleys, castles, and hills of that romantic country. Finally he landed the party at Oberammergau and engaged himself to Doll under the trees that surround the St. Gregor's Landhaus. It was a story that ran a familiar course enough, though for two of its characters it had been an almost unbelievable experience; but George, because he was an Englishman and in love and in the presence of his mother and sister, because too of Otis Gardner's solemn face, was quite unable to invest it with any of the wonder and beauty which it held for him and for Doll.

And Doll gave him no assistance.

The party had got to table during the story and she seemed, like a wise girl, who is hungry and has rare physical perfections to maintain, to attend strictly to her victuals and let the others do the talking. Serenely she consumed her nectar and ambrosia — only smiling and nodding her head now and then if George happened to appeal to her. Nobody could have guessed that she was not wholly content. But she was not. She would have had George make a very much better business of what he was doing. He could talk quite prettily when they were alone together. Why could n't he talk prettily now? To

hear him speak about it, this Bavarian journey might have been nothing more than a journey through Bavaria. A pursuit which had ended in the capture of Doll Brackett should not be recounted in terms of hotels and railway trains. Now, if ever, was the moment for George to make his mother and sister — yes, and poor dear old Otis — understand his appreciation of the great good fortune which had come to him. Yet one might suppose that he took it all as a matter of course, like the arrival or departure of one of these stupid old motor buses that he dwelt on so persistently. What must his mother and sister be thinking of her if she could inspire no more enthusiasm than this? What must Otis be thinking?

Now it was very rarely that Doll had asked herself what any one else could be thinking of her.

"And so," George concluded, "there we were, you know, and as there was no more to be done for the moment we went back to the inn and woke Mrs. Brackett up in the hammock where she'd been resting since lunch and told her and received her blessing, and had some very bad wine in honour of the occasion, and went back to Oberammergau to write our letters home, and I fancy that's all, you know. Is n't it, Doll?"

"Why," she said, "I think you've done pretty well, George. Your mother and sister don't know just how long we had to wait for that train at Prien and you didn't tell them the name of the hotel at Saltzburg or how much they charged for a bath at Eibsee, but otherwise the journey was pretty much as you've given it to us."

She ceased and stared at the bread that she was crumbling.

George was miserably aware that he had offended, miserably unable to imagine how he had done it.

Of course he ought to have known. I offer no excuses for him.

Hilda and Mrs. March, who had been perfectly satisfied to take all the romance of the journey for granted and would have been a good deal embarrassed if George had talked 'prettily' about it, were aware that a cloud was passing, though what cold wind had brought it they could not imagine. To assist it on its way Mrs. March asked when Mrs. Brackett and Doll really meant to come to Brockenhurst.

(4)

It appeared that, because they had not halted in Paris, Doll had now nothing fit to wear after their long summer's travel in Europe. A week or ten days would reestablish her wardrobe, Mrs. Brackett hoped, sufficiently to be going on with. Would Mrs. March allow them to visit her in about ten days?

But Mrs. March wanted to see them at Brockenhurst much sooner than that. Was n't it possible —?

Mrs. Brackett feared it was n't possible. It was too sweet of dear Mrs. March, but —

Doll spoke. "Mercy!" she said, "have I got to hang around in London for ten days, mother? But George says the horseback riding in the New Forest is too splendid for anything and I've got my costume right here with me. I'm just crazy to ride horseback again. Can't we get those old clothes later on?"

"But, my darling lamb," said her mother, "you've nothing —"

"Oh, please, Mrs. Brackett," put in Mrs. March, "don't think that we're dressy people. It's you and Doll we want. Please don't trouble to buy anything for Brockenhurst."

"Well," said Mrs. Brackett, "I'll tell you what we *can* do. I'll get Doll measured this afternoon, and she can be fitted for a lining to-morrow and go down to you in the evening with her maid, and I can stay and see to these clothes myself. I'll choose the materials and the models, and George can bring her to London any day we want her for fitting and take her back to you, Mrs. March, in the evening. It's only a short way to Brockenhurst on the railroad, is n't it?"

"Yes," said Mrs. March, "but you must n't —"

"Oh, dear," cried Doll, "please don't tell mother that she must n't, Mrs. March. To begin with it's no use, because what she says goes; does n't it, mother? And besides, I do so want to get to your home. It's six months since I've slept in anything but a hotel bed. So do, please, tell mother that you'll take me at once. She'll be ever so happy here, planning my dresses. She always does it and I always just let her. I won't be a bit of use until the things are all ready to be fitted, will I, mother?"

Mrs. March looked doubtfully at Mrs. Brackett.

"Yes, Mrs. March," said Mrs. Brackett, "that's so. I always plan her things, always. And don't I love it? How do you think her mother could be more happily employed than in that way? Is n't she my little Doll, My Doll That Came Alive?"

She spoke in capitals and Mrs. March looked puzzled, perhaps not unnaturally.

Mrs. Brackett crowed a small laugh, like a tenderly

triumphant war-whoop, and explained. "When I was a tiny tad," she said, "I was ever so fond of all my dolls; but there was one special one called Phœbe that I simply adored. She was a very considerable doll, and she had real hair, and she could say 'popper' and 'mommer,' and she had a whole outfit of clothes in a trunk. I first learned to use my needle making things for her. And the one wish of my heart was to have her come alive. I thought that if Phœbe could only come alive I would have nothing in the world left to wish for. I remember asking my mother if she supposed God would make Phœbe come alive if I prayed for it; but she said it would n't be right and talked very seriously to me on the subject. Poor mother! She was a very religious woman and I'm afraid I shocked her dreadfully. But I could n't see why it would n't be right at all. I supposed she just did n't want another little girl around the house. However, I was a pretty obedient child and I gave up the idea till my sister arrived on the scene. And then I thought that if there was one more there might as well be two, and after that, as soon as I was in bed and my mother had gone out of the room, I always used to kneel and say, 'Please, God, do make Phœbe come alive.' I felt it was rather sly and I was n't altogether surprised when it did n't happen. I doubted all the time if there could be any blessing on prayer conducted in that fashion against my mother's opinion. But I kept on for quite a long time and I always had a different kind of love for Phœbe from what I felt for my other dolls. I kept her always and, as I grew older, I used to take her out of her drawer and pretend that she *had* come alive and was my real child. 'And some day,' I used to say to myself, 'it will happen

really.' And at last it did and my Doll was born and all my silly prayers were answered. That's why I called her Doll, you know. She's my Doll — My Doll That Came Alive."

Mrs. Brackett ceased and touched her eyes lightly with her handkerchief.

"What a stupid old story!" she exclaimed gaily. "I'm really ashamed to have told it to you, Mrs. March. But I guess you'll not think the worse of me, will you?"

"Indeed I won't," said Mrs. March; "I think it's a charming story."

Mrs. Brackett pressed Mrs. March's hand in her sudden way. "And so," she said, "you'll let me stay here in London and see to my big baby's dresses, won't you? I'll make-believe that I'm going round the toy-shops again, looking out things for Phoebe."

"But it'll be so dull for you here all alone," Mrs. March protested.

"I won't know a dull minute," declared Mrs. Brackett. "I'll be busy all the time, and Otis'll take me round between whiles, won't you, Otis?"

Mr. Gardner inclined his head gravely. He was a grave young man.

"And," Mrs. Brackett continued, "if I know that you're making Doll happy, I'll be happy. As she says, she can't do a thing here for a week; and what's going to be the use of keeping her all that time in a London hotel, eating her heart out for your lovely English home life? If you really will make allowances for her wardrobe, why, there's no reason on earth that she should n't be with you. I know George'll agree with me."

"Of course," said George. He was accustomed, by this

time, to Mrs. Brackett's sacrifices of herself. Besides, he wanted Doll at Brockenhurst quickly.

"And Otis thinks so too, don't you, Otis?"

"Yes," said Gardner, "I think so too."

"So you see, dear Mrs. March," concluded the forcible little woman, "you're outvoted and I stay here and Doll goes to you to-morrow."

Mrs. March had nothing more to say. Hilda had nothing whatever to say. But they exchanged a glance, eloquent enough. The devotion of the American mother was a phenomenon entirely new to their experience, as was its acceptance by the American daughter.

Neither Doll nor her mother had risen in the estimation of the two March ladies. They thought Doll selfish and her mother ridiculous. It was — it could be — none of their business; but their hearts were heavy within them. "Poor George!" they were both thinking.

Luncheon came to an end and soon afterwards Mrs. March and Hilda went away. They explained that if the lining was to be fitted next day no time must be lost. Neither Mrs. Brackett nor Doll made any effort to detain them. The American ladies quite understood the importance of time if Doll was to go down to Brockenhurst next evening. George went off with his mother and sister to put them into their train. He, of course, was to stay in London in order to bring Doll to Brockenhurst.

Otis remained behind to give Mrs. Brackett and Doll the news from home because he had only just arrived in England.

CHAPTER II

(1)

THE father of George March had been a barrister, who had been sufficiently successful to leave his family when he died with enough money to support existence comfortably. George, Hilda, and their mother each had a small income. The two women, by combining their resources and living in the country, did very well. Every day they could dine on three courses of honest food and their luncheon did not too often contain done-up dishes. They knew all the people in and near Brockenhurst that they cared to know. They could go abroad now and then when they wanted to. They could get their clothes in London. Hilda could keep a horse to ride and there was a pony and governess-cart to take these ladies upon their small social adventures among the neighbouring drawing-rooms. They had two guest-rooms apart from the room which was always kept ready for George. They were simple, comfortable, country folk, or, rather, town folk who had come to live in the country. They were much in their garden and exercised benevolence within their means and to the measure of their opportunities.

George was a painter, principally of portraits. He was beginning already to be fairly well known, was generally busy, and commanded reasonable prices for his work. I suppose, with his private income (as they call it) and what he made by painting, he had about fifteen hundred pounds a year. Most of this he spent, how he could never

have told you. Some went in travel, some in loans to friends which were never repaid, much in gifts to all sorts of people, a little in clothes, a little in tobacco. He was a man of few wants and simple tastes.

He was a big, brown, handsome man, very healthy and quite devoid of envy at the success of more successful painters. He had a studio in Hampstead attached to a small house where he lived all alone with an old woman who had been his nurse. She was a rarely good cook and made her housekeeping money go twice as far as another, who had never seen George through measles and scarlet fever, could have hoped to do. George fared vastly well.

In the summer he always took six weeks' holiday, when he travelled on the Continent or angled in Ireland.

At any odd moment he could retire to his mother's house for a day or two and ride with Hilda hither and yon about The Forest.

It was a good life that George lived and it had been quite good enough for him until, when he was just on the age of thirty-seven, he saw Doll Brackett come one evening into the lounge of the Hotel Regina at Munich.

(2)

George was always meeting handsome women, for such is the lot of the portrait-painter who has at all succeeded. Therefore he was not very easily startled by any sudden appearance of one of these creatures. He was wise about them. It was his business to understand the items of which they are composed. Wherever he went he was always analysing, classifying, and appraising the faces which came under his notice and with very few of the

handsome girls did his eyes linger much more than a moment. He was infinitely more interested in ugly people, or shall I say people whom most of their neighbours consider ugly? He painted pretty women with sincere pleasure; but rugged old men in a sort of ecstasy. For him Rembrandt was the Master of Masters.

It is more than likely that if a man with whom George was acquainted had not been with the Bracketts that evening, George would have bestowed no more thought on Doll than was necessary to assure himself that she was constructed in a way that was greatly above the usual. He would have been satisfied to find her faultless. He would have thought this a highly interesting circumstance, but it would not have led him to desire any further knowledge of her. He would have finished his cigarette and gone out to the concert at the Hoffbräu without any regret for that which he must leave behind him in the lounge; for in the Hoffbräu he would be surrounded by types in whom he would much more greatly delight.

But the Bracketts had been giving dinner to a certain elderly American critic of painting and sculpture who happened to be at Munich in search of knowledge concerning the New Men, and this critic caught sight of George at once and had brought him up and introduced him all within a minute.

George had met many American girls, pretty and plain. He was prepared, therefore, to find Miss Brackett friendly and as ready to entertain as to be entertained; and he was not disappointed. George had plenty of small-talk — a portrait-painter must be able to keep his sitter alive — and so had she. They were soon on the best of terms. He knew scores of places that she had visited;

she knew several people in London whom George knew.

She had seen pictures painted by George and had known his name perfectly when the elderly critic had spoken it. It is small wonder that George did not once regret his concert at the Hoffbräu.

The elderly critic, because he liked George very much, hardly spoke a word to him all evening. He was keeping Mrs. Brackett busy. Even a critic of Art may be found to have his uses.

George's courtship was rapid, vigorous, and successful. His good looks and height served him well; his position among painters and Doll's belief (she was indebted to the elderly critic for this) that he would mount very high very soon, were not without effect.

If Doll had been really rich I suppose her mother would or might have aspired to a coronet for her; but Mrs. Brackett's means, though considerable, were not actually impressive and she could not hope, without extraordinary luck, to arrange a noble alliance for her child. A portrait-painter, however rising, was by no means what she had dreamed for Doll, but Doll wanted this one and what Doll wanted 'went.' Doll did not have to shed one tear in order to win her mother's consent.

You see, then, that all was very comfortable and satisfactory, and that if ever a man was entitled to view his coming marriage without apprehension, it was this same George March. Indeed he may be excused if, as he sat alone in the garden of his mother's house a few days after that Savoy luncheon party at which we have just assisted, he employed his time in congratulating himself for an unusually, in fact a uniquely, lucky fellow.

It was an afternoon made for glowing speculations.

Autumn was in the cool, clean air, but the sun, in which he basked, had lost little of its summer heat. Bees droned about him as they did their business between the hives, in the paddock beyond the kitchen garden, and in the massed blossoms of Mrs. March's borders. Sweet scents puffed from the firs of a neighbouring enclosure. His eyes dwelt contentedly upon blue distances that lay behind the trunks and branches of the old lime row which sheltered the east side of the lawn. He had lunched to admiration and a satisfactory digestive process had almost completed itself. Doll was in the house, putting on her tennis-shoes, and Mrs. Brackett was in the Savoy Hotel, ninety-two miles away.

What lover, worthy of the name (and by the way, there are not so many of them), could have been otherwise than happy?

(3)

A figure intruded itself upon George's rosy visions. Dick Crewe was advancing towards him over the lawn.

George waved a sluggish hand at this family friend and hailed him civilly. He did not want to entertain Dick in the least, because he wanted to play lawn-tennis with Doll; but complete frankness is impossible here below, and when a man has ridden eight miles to pay his respects to your future wife the least you can do is to appear to be glad to see him. As Dick came over the grass George's eye dwelt pleasurable upon the young man's excellent appearance. He was a confoundedly good-looking fellow, be hanged to him! with that dark, lean face of his and those fine brown eyes and those even white teeth and

that trim little mustache. The very figure of a horseman, too; five foot seven, not an ounce too much on his trim bones, and turned out, as always, to within an inch of his life. Look at the thin, shiny boots of him and the cut of those breeches and his coat, good Lord! How did tailors make coats fit like that? Or was it not that God made men occasionally just to be fitted by tailors? P'r'aps that was it. P'r'aps that was it.

George was still a little drowsy and speculative.

Dick arrived and thrust out a long, slim hand.

"Good luck to you, George," he said. "I hope I'm to see her." He gripped George's hand with a force which would have given George a dismal surprise if he had not expected it.

"You are," said George. "She'll be here in a minute. Hilda told me she'd sent you word."

"Yes. I got her note this morning. You're a lazy old devil, you know, George. Why could n't you write yourself? I'd a dashed good mind to stay at home."

"My dear lad," said George, "I'm much too busy sitting about and hugging myself to waste any time in letter-writing even to the companions of my schoolboy days. And I knew Hilda would let you know."

"Hilda spoils you," said the other.

"Yes," yawned George, "that's what brothers are given to sisters for, are n't they?"

"Well," said Crewe, "what about it? Who is she? How did you meet her? When did it happen? Hilda gave me no details at all, of course. Told me to come over and get them for myself. So fire ahead." He lit a cigarette and leaned back luxuriously in his chair, smiling pleasantly on George, of whom he was prodigiously fond.

"Here she comes," said George.

Doll, a lawn-tennis racket in her hand, had just emerged from the French window of the drawing-room. She was bareheaded and her hair in the sunlight seemed all on fire.

Dick Crewe turned and saw her coming towards him. "Good God!" he whispered excitedly as he scrambled to his feet, and George laughed softly, happily; for however much (in these cases) we may realise our own good fortune, the sweetness of it is never diminished by the knowledge that our friends realise it too.

"Doll," said George, "this is Dick Crewe. I should say Sir Richard Crewe, one of my oldest friends."

"Sir Richard Crewe?" said Doll, with her flattering American semi-interrogation. She gave him her hand in her own royal way, sat down, and waited for him to say something pretty to her. She believed that he was capable of saying something very pretty.

He disappointed her. He said, "I'm awfully glad — I mean, this is a delightful —" and said no more. And he wondered, "What's the matter with me, anyhow?" for he was generally quite equal to an occasion of this sort. The truth is that the girl had struck him temporarily foolish.

Having given him his chance, which he failed to take, Doll now dismissed Crewe from her consideration.

"Peters has just come in to say," she announced, "that Lorna's kicked herself and that I can't have her to-morrow. Is n't that too bad, George? And what are we to do? Do you suppose we can hire anything here that won't shake me to bits?"

For their rides Hilda had put her mare at Doll's disposal and George had hired, as he always did.

"Lorna hurt?" George cried. "I must go and see about that. I'll leave you and Doll to make friends, Dick." He got out of his chair.

"But, George," she cried, "*do* you think I can get anything here — ?"

"Of course," he remarked. "Brockenhurst's stiff with good horses. I'll find you something after tea, don't be afraid. You shall have your ride to-morrow if I have to go over to Beaulieu to-night and break into Dick's stables and burgle you a mount. Back in a moment." And he ambled away, anxious, in the direction of the coach-house.

You are not to suppose that this was a hint to Crewe. George knew too well the capacity of Brockenhurst to provide any kind of horse or donkey at a moment's notice to be in the slightest doubt about Doll's morning ride on the following day. He would find her something suitable in ten minutes; not a Lorna, perhaps, but something that Doll would enjoy thoroughly. Horridge had had a little mare in the spring that would be just the ticket; or there was that brown horse at the Fox and Angel that he had tried the day before yesterday and thought too light for his weight. It would suit Doll well for a day or two. He hoped Lorna had n't damaged herself at all seriously. Doll enjoyed Lorna so much. And Hilda would be awfully cut up if anything happened to Lorna. Thank Heaven, this injury had n't been done while Doll was on the poor beast!

Yes, though George had never dreamed of hinting, he had not gone six yards before Crewe, who had at last pulled himself together, said: "I've got the very thing for you, Miss Brackett: a bay mare. She's just eating off

her head with us and I'll be really grateful if you'll give her some exercise. She can hand that fat Lorna fifty yards in a hundred, and she goes like velvet, and she's as kind as a dove. I'll send her over this evening. They've a spare stall here, you know."

Doll regarded him with eyes that were more indulgent than they had been. "Now that's very kind of you, Sir Richard," she said. "I think it's just a lovely idea."

The proposal was accepted. It never occurred to Doll even to hesitate about accepting it. She was much too perfectly accustomed to hearing young men offering her their hearts to make any trouble over a suggestion from one of them to lend her a horse.

"Good!" said Crewe. "Excellent!" He had been aware of having done badly at the beginning, but he felt now that he had made up all lost ground. She was clearly pleased with him. He wished to stand well with this girl who was going to marry old George. He was, as I have said, very fond of George.

"I think," she observed, "that your New Forest is just too beautiful, Sir Richard. George is going to show it all to me, bit by bit."

"Well," he said, "don't forget to make him take you to Beaulieu. You'll find a dear old abbey there and as sound a breakfast as you'll get in Hampshire or anywhere else. My mother will be delighted to see you two people any day. You must forgive her for not coming over to call on you, but she can only get about in a chair, poor darling; and she never leaves our place, of course."

"That's too bad," said Doll, and her eyes filled with sudden, easy tears, for her heart was soft in many places. The sincerity of her voice and expression contrasted

oddly with the words she had employed, but she must not be blamed for using the language to which she had been born. "And does she keep house for you, Sir Richard! — an invalid like that?"

"Rather!" he said with enthusiasm; "and no house is better run, I can assure you. Oh, my mother's not the kind to give in. She'd order my dinner on her death-bed."

"Now I call that fine," said Doll. "I hope I shall see her very soon. You're pretty fond of your mother, are n't you, Sir Richard?"

"Yes," he said with a laugh, "I'm pretty fond of her, Miss Brackett."

"That's good," she said and nodded and smiled at him. "I like men to be fond of their mothers. George's mother's a good deal of a dear, is n't she?"

He agreed and the conversation, thus satisfactorily begun, continued upon the same agreeable lines. They talked about George and The Forest and horses and America and steamships and several other things. In a word, they 'made friends' happily enough. She found him a very 'attractive' man and he thought her the most beautiful girl he had ever seen in his life.

Meanwhile George, in the stable, examined the near hind leg of Lorna and concerted wise measures with his mother's coachman-gardener for the banishment of the dear mare's small suffering.

CHAPTER III

(1)

IT was not Doll's fault if men fell in love with her; indeed, this experience, common though it was, had never failed to trouble her, until George came under her notice. Her sentiments, when it happened, were generally compounded of about one quarter pity and three quarters annoyance, though very often the annoyance predominated. She was always a hundred thousand miles from understanding what being 'hard hit' means to a man; but she supposed vaguely that to be refused was a more or less painful experience and she hated giving pain to any one unnecessarily. She would murmur to herself, "Poor Boy!" or "Poor old thing!" or "Poor fellow!" or "It's too bad!" and honestly feel something like sorrow for a few minutes or, in extreme cases, hours. But far more was she annoyed (though this she did not confess to herself — I doubt if she even suspected it) at the loss of a pleasant companion to go out riding with her or drive her in his motor-car or furnish her with restaurant dinners, seats at the theatre, flowers, chocolates, and other spoil — I should say, offerings.

She would have liked all these rejected young men to go on just as before; but none of them did. With her refusal of them all these agreeable things automatically disappeared. It was a great pity, she always felt, that such a small matter as her unwillingness to marry them

should come between her and all these advantages. Quite sincerely she could never understand it.

She had been brought up to believe that Man was made for Woman's convenience. Her father had worked himself to death, with hardly a day's pause since she had known him, to provide her and her mother with everything that they wanted; and this was not a little. The husbands of all the women she knew were doing the same thing for their wives and daughters. Every young man of her acquaintance was spending his money right and left (she never considered whether these young men could or could not afford to do this) to provide some girl of her acquaintance with confectionery or violets or concert-tickets; and she had never known, since she had been a baby, what it was to lack some boy, youth, or man who seemed to think it his highest privilege to do the same by her. And when these people asked her to marry them she was always at heart thoroughly aggrieved (though she always denied them with kind words) because here was another pleasant friendship destroyed. Had it not been that there were invariably half a dozen candidates for each vacancy as it arose, I don't know how Doll would have survived these continual disappointments; but hope is a great asset and the girl always told herself that the new friend would not be foolish. And then it would begin all over again and, from her perception of the first preliminary symptoms to the final dismissal, the tiresome, pitiful, disheartening business would have to be played out.

At one time she had made some effort, in a few cases, to check the disease in its early stages but always without success, and she had now given up any attempt to escape

from the inevitable. Passively she submitted to adoration until an active rôle should be forced upon her. Since it seemed that every man she met must necessarily want to marry her, what was the use of foregoing very many most pleasant hours? It was disagreeable to have to break with the poor things, but meanwhile they and she enjoyed a great deal of mutual entertainment; and she always hoped that they did not feel the parting very acutely. At length she had reached a point where she absolutely looked upon their worship as a right, as something which happened in the natural order of events, and would have been almost as seriously concerned had it been absent as if the sun should have failed one morning to rise in the east.

That she would marry some day was a foregone conclusion; the only difficulty that confronted her was one of selection; and that she accepted George March is to be explained less by any overwhelming superiority to his rivals which he exhibited than by a kind of weariness in balancing claims which she had begun to feel about the time when she met him. She liked him very much, as she had liked so many others. He was a distinguished person; but many others had been more distinguished than he. He was no more good-looking or comfortably circumstanced than a score that she could have ticked off on her pretty fingers; but he happened to arrive at a time when she was beginning to make up her mind that her moment for settling down could not be far off; and so, without any very decided feelings for or against him, she took her plunge and gave him her promise.

Nor did she regret having done so in the least.

George had proved a most satisfactory lover and she

had found, with considerable relief if not absolute delight, that the condition of being engaged was one for which there seemed a great deal to be said. She assumed that this amounted to being in love and made the most of it. As to marriage she had no objection to it whatever. It would hamper her in some directions; but in others it would be a decided advantage. She would have a house of her own, would live in London instead of in New York, move among people who would become steadily more and more famous as time went on, and, who knew? be Lady March before she died. On the other hand, certain excitements that had hitherto constantly attended her existence would be at an end. Nobody would fall in love with her any more and (this was almost a comforting thought) she would not have to refuse any more people ever. Her relations with men would henceforth be uncomplicated, if a little tame; but one could not have everything, and probably any loss which she must suffer would be more than balanced by the gain which she would make. She was quite sure that she would make a gain of some kind. Otherwise why did women marry?

This poor, lovely girl was innocent and ignorant and dangerous to an incredible degree; and for this there was no one to blame, except her mother. But since Mrs. Brackett had no faintest doubt that she had acted wisely in this matter, there is nothing more to be said. The mischief, if any, was done; and there is no doubt that Mrs. Brackett's intentions were of the best.

(2)

Dick Crewe's beautiful bay mare arrived that evening and was accommodated next to the invalid Lorna. George said that it was very decent of old Dick, and thought no more about it. Hilda and her mother said that it was just like Dick, and thought no more about it. The March family were accustomed to Crewe's generosity and accepted them as a matter of course. He was rich, and they had known him all his life, and he was a dear fellow. It was perfectly natural that he should do them and theirs kindly service from time to time.

Doll said that it was too sweet of Sir Richard, and she also thought no more about it. A bunch of violets, a few bits of candy, the loan of a valuable horse, what were such things that they should occupy her mind for more than a very few moments?

It was George who proposed that her first ride upon Diana should be to Beaulieu, that they might show Crewe what an artistic triumph he had achieved. Doll liked that, after it had been made a little clearer to her, and agreed at once. She was quite aware that she looked well on horseback and Sir Richard certainly deserved to see her and his mare together. She was pleased with George for thinking of it. And there was the abbey at Beaulieu. That would be interesting, no doubt.

With that she remembered that Sir Richard had invited them to breakfast and she told George about this, and George was again pleased with Dick and told himself that old Dick was certainly doing the right thing by them.

So on the following morning they set out from Brockenhurst about half-past seven o'clock and rode over to Beau-

lieu through the young day. There was no wind and the exquisite sky was clear of cloud. The low sun already burned their faces, but the air was still cold from the night's frost. In every least patch of shade the ground was white and hard and, where the heat struck, early midges danced above the sere grass and fern. George knew every path in this quarter of The Forest and they left the road with the village. It was good to hear the 'crunch, crunch' of the horses' hoofs as they cut through the stiffened surface of the rides. For our lovers, squirrels scampered and climbed; for them small birds sang; the firs breathed rare perfumes upon them. Their senses were perpetually charmed. George was utterly in love and Doll honestly thought herself in the same case. It was a very pleasant ride.

On Beaulieu Heath they galloped a mile through the heather and drew up, insane with joy, at Hatchet Gate. Thence down the hill, more soberly upon the metal, to claim their breakfast from the Crewes.

They found Dick (in the riding-clothes which seemed to be his only wear) seated on his front doorsteps and occupied in teaching a young fox-terrier to retrieve a bit of rabbit skin. The sound of the horses' steps caused him to look up from this business and he was instantly on his feet. He came quickly towards them and his eyes shone with honest admiration of Doll and Diana and pleasure at this prompt arrival. We all like to feel that our little kindnesses are valued.

"I thought you might come over," he said. "How does the mare go?"

Doll said that the mare was just too sweet for anything, and George glowed to think that he had been so happily

inspired. It was right that old Dick, after having done the decent thing so decently, should not have to wait for his reward.

A youthful gardener relieved them of the horses, and they went indoors where they found Dick's mother, that moment wheeled into the dining-room, ready to give them breakfast.

Twenty years before her horse had bolted while they were hunting in Lady Cross and a low branch had swept her from the saddle. When they picked her up her hunting days were done. George had told Doll all about it; they had passed the very scene of the accident; Doll was fresh from one of the finest rides of her life. It is not wonderful that the girl's not very vivid imagination was stirred or that her naturally kind heart was moved to compassion by the sight of this pretty, sad-faced woman in the wheeled chair. She dimly realised the tragedy and exerted herself to be pleasant to her hostess. Lady Crewe, though she was a little distrustful of Americans as she was of all foreign people, was ready, for George's sake, to be nice to this girl; Doll's exterior captivated her eye at once; and it was not long before the old woman and the young were good friends.

Meanwhile George pegged away at kidneys and what-not.

(3)

After breakfast there was the inspection of the garden, which no visitors to a country house may escape, winter or summer. In this case there happened to be a good deal to see, for Lady Crewe's garden was a famous one; but I

will not inflict upon you any seedsman's list of polypodiums. It is enough that Doll enjoyed her stroll beside the wheeled chair and strengthened her position with her hostess by many admiring exclamations. She adored flowers and to her East American eye the wealth of blossoms which surrounded her seemed almost fabulous.

Lady Crewe, before the end, fairly doted on Doll and said several things to George, while Doll and Dick happened to be at a little distance from them, which made the happy fellow blush with gratification. On parting she kissed the girl affectionately, and told her to come again soon and whispered something about George's luck with which Doll found herself in perfect agreement.

Then the three who were not dependent upon wheeled chairs went to see the abbey with which Doll was good enough to be delighted. She had seen many old ruins in Europe, but not one under such pleasant conditions. Dick, in spite of his perpetual riding-breeches, knew all about Beaulieu's history and could say what he knew very well. Doll found his guidance much more amusing and interesting than that of the professional custodians to whom she was accustomed.

Their leisurely existence had now brought them past midday and it was time for Doll and George to return to Brockenhurst. Dick did his best to keep them to luncheon, but there was a possibility of Mrs. Brackett arriving at Brockenhurst in time for that meal (she was to join Doll for this Saturday afternoon and Sunday), and it was not in Doll to risk disappointing her mother. A parent's adoration can discipline a yielding and affectionate nature more surely than brutality can dominate a savage beast. And not only this. Doll was by no means so indifferent

to the question of her raiment as you may have supposed, and when she agreed to leave her mother in London, she did it, first, with perfect confidence in Mrs. Brackett's judgment and, secondly, with perfect delight at the idea of exchanging the stuffy tedium of the modistes' establishments for the fresh air and horse-riding which The Forest offered her. And now she wished to attack, at the earliest possible moment, the pleasant duty of deciding between the many delightful proposals which her mother would have to submit as the result of her recent spade-work among the dressmakers.

Dick Crewe's hope of keeping her to luncheon was therefore fond in the extreme. She was regretful but quite firm.

So he said that he would set her and George a bit on their road and had his horse brought round with theirs.

Of course he accompanied them all the way to Brockenhurst and stayed — poor fool! — to lunch and then to tea.

How could he know that he had perhaps done better to let his guests go unaccompanied home and then, taking a strong rope, tie a running noose in it and hang himself withal?

Of course he could not know. He thought himself perfectly safe because George was his friend and he himself was a gentleman. He forgot that in order to be a gentleman one must also be a man and that in order to be a man one must also be an animal. And Dick was not the first gentleman to lose sight of this unfortunate truth and I suppose that he has not been the last.

(4)

A few minutes after Hilda had driven away in the pony cart to meet the train by which Mrs. Brackett was expected, the telephone announced a telegram which said that she was motoring down and would be with them for tea; and about four o'clock the brisk little woman appeared in a big grey motor-car, driven by Otis Gardner. This young man had been going somewhere out of London for the Sunday in any case, and she had commandeered him and his vehicle and his company because, as she explained, "He might just as well spend his Sunday in the New Forest as anywhere else, and he had been such a comfort to her in London that she could n't bear the idea of his putting in a lonely week-end all among strangers." It was fairly evident that, after her hospitable American fashion, she expected Mrs. March to accommodate Otis in her house. This, for sheer lack of room, was impossible, but Otis made it quite clear at once that he had not shared this expectation by announcing that he had already engaged a room by telephone at the Balmer Lawn Hotel, where he hoped they would all dine with him that evening. He said, moreover, that he and his car were at the service of any of them who cared about motoring. The ladies, he said, might enjoy a scurry to Salisbury and Stonehenge to-morrow. Anyhow, the car was there if they chose to use it.

Everybody thought it very kind of Otis to say such things and applauded Mrs. Brackett for bringing him. Indeed, Otis was an agreeable, quiet fellow and it was impossible to think him intrusive. Doll was particularly pleased with him, because, though six months ago she had

declined to marry him, he was still ready to put himself at her disposal; and such cases were very, very rare and correspondingly to be valued.

She beamed on her dear old Otis and gave her new Sir Richard the cold shoulder for a full hour until, tea over, the dear old Otis went off to secure his room at the hotel and do what was necessary to be done to his paint and machinery. Otis was still young enough to be unwilling to leave the toilette of his car to hireling hands.

As soon as he had gone, Doll and her mother retired to Mrs. Brackett's bedroom, where in one of Mrs. Brackett's two suitcases, reposed the samples of silk and cloth and the coloured prints and sketches which were to occupy them for the next two hours.

A little later Crewe took himself off and rode moodily homewards. He had not had a smile from Miss Brackett for an hour. If he had been a little less absorbed in his own plight, he might have observed that George had suffered under a similar deprivation. But it never occurred to him to consider how George was treated. George was engaged to her, lucky old devil! *He was all right.*

So went away this poor Richard Crewe with the dart through his vitals, manfully protesting that he was glad because old George was so happy and had done so well for himself.

He rode his horse into a lather and was surprised to find how quickly he had got home. He supposed that Mrs. March's hall-clock must have been all wrong. But there had been nothing the matter with Mrs. March's hall-clock.

Let us all pray for Richard Crewe.

Otis Gardner dined them that night and drove them to Stonehenge next day after lunch and carried Mrs. Brackett back to London on the Monday morning. The March family liked him very much, and begged him to repeat his visit on the following Saturday, which he did, and on this occasion he was every bit as agreeable and useful as he had been on the first.

Meanwhile Richard Crewe had ridden over from Beau-lieu twice for tea and Doll and George had ridden over to Beaulieu once for lunch. And Doll had been to London three times for fittings, twice with George alone and once with George and Hilda. This third time they all lunched with Otis Gardner, and, while Doll and her mother were at the dressmaker's, George and Hilda went to a matinée with Otis at George's expense, with which end in view — I mean the matinée, not Otis's society — George, being a good brother, had taken Hilda to London. After that they had tea at Otis's club, and then they called for Doll and took her back to Brockenhurst, thoroughly worn out, poor dear, but very happy because all her troubles were over.

There is, of course, nothing more dreary than a bald statement of fact such as that to which you have just been treated, but it is not always the most lively writing which is most worth reading. To persons of intelligence and imagination, there is generally more in a bald statement of fact than at once appears, and as the less an artist assumes a total lack of intelligence and imagination in those whom he addresses (whether through their eyes or their ears), the better chance he has of producing something worth the world's while, I do not propose to amplify my short record of that week's events save to ask

you to read it over once again carefully. You will find in it, I think, the almost definite promise of misfortune and a not very mistakable hint at a sober and amiable romance.

(5)

On one of these visits to London, George took Doll and her mother to Hampstead that Doll might see the house where she was to live until she should be able to find something more to her taste. It was assumed that the Hampstead house would not be good enough for Doll's permanent abode, but Mrs. Brackett was not in favour of making any attempt to find another until George should bring his wife home from America in the spring. Then Doll would have plenty of time to look about her. A house was not a thing to be chosen in a hurry; and this occupation and the subsequent furnishing would give Doll a strong, active interest and help her not to feel so much the first loneliness and strangeness of England. Thus Mrs. Brackett; and George, though perhaps he felt that she might have expressed herself a trifle more happily, agreed with her.

So between two bouts of fitting, they all got into a cab and drove out to North End where was George's little, odd old house.

The door was opened to them by Mary Bates, that ex-nurse to George of whom I have spoken.

This Mary Bates was a woman of extraordinary ugliness, but she had a heart of gold and a rare hand with pastry, which make up for a deal of plain looks in a house-keeper. George, as we know, had no objection to ugliness

so long as it was paintable, and Mary's large cheeks, little pig's eyes, buttony nose, and capacious mouth would probably have commended themselves to him by their comicality had not he learned to love them in his early youth (before his taste was at all formed) from awakening daily to behold them beaming benevolently upon him. But Mary's capacity as a cook-housekeeper would have endeared her to any man. And George (a lover of comfort) valued her above all his possessions. He regarded her as a fixture in his house just as much as the gas-meter, and it never occurred to him to suppose that Doll would not share this view. Of course, they would move as soon as possible after their marriage, but, equally of course, Mary would move with them to look after them as she had looked after him. I doubt if he even formulated this thought to himself, so far was he from being able to conceive its contrary.

Mrs. Brackett, however, was perfectly capable of doing so. To employ an appropriate Americanism, Mary Bates gave Mrs. Brackett the shock of her life. As for Doll, she received no shock because she was not in the habit of looking ahead of the moment in which she happened to be living. She found Mary a droll circumstance of the visit to George's house, but it never occurred to her to ask herself whether Mary would or would not remain. Since she knew that George was very fond of this old oddity, she was as pleasant to Mary as she was able to be to a servant and thought no more about it. Mrs. Brackett also knew that George was very fond of Mary, but, with her, the knowledge gave rise to misgivings. To persuade George to part with this Mary of his was going to be a difficult matter; but undoubtedly it would have to be

done. Such a person was perhaps very well to open the front door for George, a bachelor and an artist; but not for her Doll. But all this was for the future. For the present it was enough to smile amiably upon Mary and to say a few civil things to her about her care of George in the past — in the *past*. There would be plenty of time to make Doll understand that Mary was quite out of the future, no matter how fond George might be of her.

George, poor soul, was delighted with these ladies' treatment of his guardian angel and — if it were possible — loved Doll more than ever.

Mrs. Brackett and Doll inspected the house; expressed themselves enchanted with its 'cuteness' and 'cunningness.' They were, to be sure, a little horrified to find only one bathroom in it, because they came from a land where Cleanliness is not content with being ahead of Godliness, but insists on bordering upon Absurdity. But they had come in no carping mood; it was understood that this house was to be only a very temporary lodging; so they said nothing about the many deficiencies in its plumbing and concentrated all their attention upon its oak paneling, its fine old carved chimney-pieces, its admirable ceilings, and its pleasant little shady garden.

Upstairs in George's big studio they found laid out an extravagant meal, on the preparation of which the good Bates had lavished prodigies of care, skill, and thought. Doll, throned and framed in an ancient Spanish stamped-leather chair, dispensed the tea, munched cakes in silence, and longed for ice-cream and candy. George, in silence, made a pastel sketch of his lady to keep him company in the studio during the separation which approached and cast his mind into the future, when Doll

would again be in that chair and Mrs. Brackett would be in America. Perhaps Mrs. Brackett was doing the same thing, but, if so, it did not impede the flow of her conversation, which was perfectly steady.

Mary Bates, as they drove away to London and more fittings, stood in the door, cap all on one side, grinning and waving her hand with a familiarity that greatly distressed Mrs. Brackett's democratic soul. But the little woman took comfort in the thought that this eyesore would not survive very long the return of Doll to George's house. Mary Bates was obviously impossible, and if Doll did n't already see it, she must be brought to do so. Mrs. Brackett thought of that Mary opening Doll's front door to Professor and Mrs. Hart, or to Mrs. Dryburg-Wanseeker, or to any other of those friends at home who would surely visit Doll when they should be passing through London each fall; and she shuddered.

And now for a few more bald statements of fact.

Mrs. Brackett and Doll sailed for New York from Southampton at the end of three weeks, and George, Hilda, Otis Gardner, and Dick Crewe were there to see them off. Gardner would perhaps have gone with them, only he had resolved to pass the winter in England and learn the art of deer-hunting as it is practised in the New Forest.

Dick Crewe gave up deer-hunting in the New Forest that winter in favour of big-game-hunting in Africa. He vanished from the scene about a fortnight after Mrs. Brackett's return to America. I suppose he hoped to find Africa less full of devils than England, just like other mistaken young men.

George settled down to work for the three months

which Mrs. Brackett had insisted should elapse before he should come over to America for their wedding. This took him to Hampstead, but Hilda was not prevented by his absence — at any rate, for lack of an escort — from hunting the deer pretty steadily.

When the three months were up, George took Hilda to be one of the bridesmaids and Otis Gardner to be his best man (Dick being still abroad), and sailed away under the firm impression that once a matter of ten days was past, no other condition than perfect happiness would ever be possible for him.

Bridegrooms go into marriage with misgivings more commonly than is supposed; George was emphatically not among the doubters. Even while he lay prostrate in his berth, as he did nearly all the way to New York, he never once regretted having asked an American to marry him.

The corollary to George's prostration is the perpetual parading of the deck by the other two members of the party.

Did I say that Otis Gardner had intended to hunt all winter in the New Forest? Well, it seems that he changed his mind.

Doll would have been hurt if he had not gone over for her wedding and George needed a best man of some kind. In any case Otis did not propose to stay long in America; just long enough to marry the two of them off and visit his grandmother in Philadelphia; and perhaps he might be useful in seeing Miss March back across the Altantic. And this is the way he talked, the honest man.

And now let me record a wedding in New York at the house of Mrs. Brackett; Riverside Drive clogged with

confetti, and the big American moon looking benignly down upon them all in their expensive fur coats; a honeymoon journey to Florida and the West Indies — blue skies, blue sea, more moon, a fortnight in New York with Mrs. Brackett; then, a prosperous return across the Atlantic and arrival at the little Hampstead house to find a letter from Hilda and Otis, welcoming them home and announcing their engagement.

CHAPTER IV

(1)

GEORGE ought to have been wonderfully satisfied with himself. Here he was at thirty-seven, making money and fame by the exercise of an art which he worshipped, always in the best of health, and married to the most lovely girl in the whole world and the sweetest to boot. And Mrs. Brackett was in America.

Not that he disliked Mrs. Brackett. On the contrary, he was strongly under the impression that he was very fond of her. No one, evidently, who adored Doll as her mother did could fail to command his affection. The very considerable allowance which she was giving to Doll should have been another point in her favour, for generosity was a virtue which George, like all generous people, admired sincerely. But George, as it happened, would rather, much rather, have had Doll receive nothing at all from her mother. Doll's allowance would certainly enable her to dress a good deal better than if she were wholly dependent upon what he could give her; but fine clothes for his wife were not everything in George's eyes. In short, he wanted no help in making Doll happy. That is to say, he was jealous of Mrs. Brackett's allowance to Doll. Otherwise stated, he did not wholly love Mrs. Brackett. But this is not to say that he disliked her. And had I not the honour to inform you, a moment ago, that he did not dislike her?

Every man who is soundly in love must be a little

jealous of his mother-in-law. To her the precious object has belonged for eighteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty, or fifty years, as the case may be. Hers are all the precious memories of the budding and the blossoming which he would give worlds to share and may not. Inso-much as there are any years at all of his wife's life in which he has had no part, such a man cannot be perfectly content. The mother is, to that extent, better off than he and he cannot forgive her this. George was no more jealous in this respect than any other good fellow and the circumstance did not cause him any serious grief. Had he been able to feel that Mrs. Brackett had now yielded to him all claim upon her child, he would have thought nothing about it; but this allowance, though welcome in many ways, was an unescapable reminder that the little woman in America was not satisfied to leave Doll's happiness wholly to him. Still she must have her finger in the pie.

George, then, resented the fact of the allowance; but in the very nature of things his resentment was impossible to express. He simply had to put up with it.

Doll's frank enjoyment of the money was an added trouble. He could have wished her to regard this addition to their income — if accept it she must — as something which gave pleasure to her mother rather than to herself; to take it for the sake of Mrs. Brackett, and not for her own. But Doll never seemed to look upon it in that way at all. She evidently thought it perfectly proper that her mother should be going to send her a fat draft every quarter, and no doubt it was.

But George was very much in love.

On one thing he was determined. This allowance was

to be wholly between Mrs. Brackett and Doll. He would have nothing to do with it. It was Doll's; not 'theirs.' It must go direct into Doll's banking account and she must spend it exactly as she pleased, without any advice on his part. The amount which he was to give her for housekeeping and dress and her small spendings was to be calculated without reference to Mrs. Brackett's donations. This matter was settled between them in Jamaica. Doll found no difficulty at all in accepting this proposal; she even seemed surprised that he should have made it; and poor George did not know whether to be happy because she had agreed so readily or miserable because he had gained his point without a word of protest from her.

So, even before they got home, George had discovered that Mrs. Brackett, though left behind in America, was still a force to be reckoned with, and he had not been long in his house before the influence made itself felt in a way still more disturbing to his peace of mind.

They dined on their first evening, alone, — the rest of the family had tactfully not come to London to greet them, — and sumptuously. Mary Bates had seen to that. The meal had been conceived on a scale which, if maintained, would have cast George and Doll into the workhouse within the year. There were angels-on-horse-back, boiled salmon steaks with mayonnaise, lamb cutlets and a grilled spring chicken apiece and a chocolate soufflé, all washed down with George's best champagne and followed by some unimpeachable Turkish coffee. While George was blessing his stars that had given him such a cook for such a wife, Doll said, leaning her elbows on the table and her chin on her hands, fingers crossed,

palms down, "It seems a shame, George, that Mary should be such a good cook."

"A shame?" he echoed. "A shame, Doll?"

"Why," she said, "don't you see that if she was n't there'd be no difficulty."

"What difficulty?" he asked as he gave her a light for her cigarette. "I should say that her cooking simplifies our existence most satisfactorily."

"No," she said, "that's just the point. It would seem almost wicked to let such a cook go."

"Go?" he cried, alarmed. "Mary wants to go?"

"Oh, no," said Doll, "I did n't say that, George. Mary certainly does n't want to go."

"Then, what—?"

"Well," Doll went on; "of course we can't keep her *except* as a cook and I'm wondering if she'll consent to that. You see, she's been used to running your house altogether for so long that she may n't like the idea of my getting in a proper parlour-maid. Of course, Mary's a cook in ten thousand; but as a front-door-opener she's not exactly ornamental, is she? And do you think she's just the sort of woman to bring tea into *my* drawing-room and wait at *my* table?"

"She's always done it for me," said George. He ought to have seen that this was not an unanswerable argument, but he was taken too much by surprise to have his wits perfectly under control. For several years Mary had been a sort of Providence to him; he had come to regard her as one of the necessities of existence; and it upset the poor fellow dreadfully to discover that any one — and particularly Doll — should feel any doubt as to the dear creature's power to do everything beautifully.

“Why,” said Doll, “you poor darling old George, of course she has. Don’t I know that she’s looked after you like an extra mother all your life and don’t I love her for it? But you must see that there’s a difference now. Mary’s just as dear and valuable as she can be, and when you were unmarried she was exactly right, because nobody cares what kind of a servant a bachelor has so long as she is n’t handsome, and no one can accuse Mary of that, can they? But now you don’t need to have freaks in this house any more. Of course she’ll be all right in the kitchen, if she cares about that, because no one knows or minds who has cooked a good dinner; but as a waitress at the kind of dinner-party I’m going to give, Mary really is n’t a practical proposition. I must have a good-looking girl, George. It’s no use trying to entertain if you don’t do it well. You see, you’ve known Mary so long that you’ve got used to her. You don’t begin to realise the kind of impression she makes on people who see her for the first time. You don’t as much as suspect what a comical old outrage she is. Why, mother very nearly fell down dead when Mary opened the door to us that day we all came out here to tea. Of course, she said nothing at the time, but afterwards she confessed to me that she was surprised that a painter like you, with all your love of beautiful things, should be able to put up with such a woman about you. Of course, she knew that Mary had been your nurse and all that, and she honours you for your loyalty to the poor old thing; but she could n’t help feeling that it would n’t be right for Mary to stay on here just as before, after we were married. She said she was sure you’d see that yourself, and understand that while you owed Mary a great deal, no doubt, you would

owe me something as well and that you'd never hesitate in this matter. Of course, I said that, even if you did n't see it yourself, you'd see it the moment I pointed it out to you, and I assured her that Mary should be cook only in the future and that comforted mother a good deal. Of course, she does n't want Mary to be discharged; but she can't endure the idea of her being seen by my guests when they come here. Mother's always so particular about her servants' appearance; she thinks it's so important. She says that you can tell a woman's real quality by the kind of girl who opens her door to you, and I don't want our friends, George, to get a notion that I'm not able to run your home properly. *Do you?* And what am I to say to mother when she comes over in the spring, if Mary's still our only servant? I truly won't be able to face her, George."

Doll ceased talking at last; and George, because her eyes were so beautiful, could find nothing to say but, "Well, and what do you propose?" And because Doll's mouth was so lovely when it pouted and pleaded, the resentment which he felt at this proposal, to exile his Mary from all parts of the house where she would be visible to guests, fell wholly upon Mrs. Brackett, far away across the Atlantic Ocean. What business was it of hers what servants they had? he should like to know. Of course Doll was perfectly right. Mary was not ornamental and Doll could not be expected to regard her in the same way as he did. Of course Doll would want a smarter kind of maid for the dining-room and drawing-room. Mary had been good enough for a bachelor, entertaining other bachelors, but now things were different — quite different. He saw that clearly. Doll was perfectly right

and they must get a better-looking girl — a proper waitress. The thing had only to be pointed out to him, of course. But it was hardly Mrs. Brackett's affair. He should have thought that she could have supposed them capable of managing their own house properly. For a moment, while Doll talked, he had been tempted to put his foot down firmly and refuse to disturb Mary, not because Doll was not perfectly right, but because by so doing he would be challenging, now, at the beginning of things, this mother's influence which a sudden uneasy premonition told him might be likely to increase. But Doll seemed so perfectly right that he could not do it. It would be petty to deny her this most reasonable wish simply because her mother had suggested it to her. And the thought of the dispute and, possibly, the quarrel which might ensue, should he refuse, was odious to him. He felt that if ever he and Doll quarrelled, as perhaps they would, though God forbid it, he would prefer to quarrel about something of which Mrs. Brackett knew nothing. It seemed to him that it would be to give Mrs. Brackett satisfaction to dispute about Mary. So he asked Doll what she proposed to do.

Doll had her answer quite ready, and the result was that, three days later, a tidy and pretty young girl arrived to relieve Mary Bates of her more conspicuous duties.

Mary, who loved George devotedly, did her very best for a few weeks to accommodate herself to the new situation; but the new girl was almost immediately aware that her mistress did not like Mary (nobody likes those whom they have injured) and her attitude to Mary was coloured by this knowledge. Mary loathed the insolent new girl;

wearied for a sight of George and an evening gossip with him; grew more and more miserable; came to detest Doll; gave notice; and departed, weeping and prophesying beneath her breath, all sorts of terrible misfortunes.

George, who for a month had been listening to things unfavourable to Mary, accepted the position with a few sighs (some of regret and some of relief), and told himself that Doll was perfectly right and that it had been foolish to expect Mary to adapt herself to the new conditions. It had been impossible for her to accept orders from a mistress in a house where for so long she had enjoyed a perfectly free hand. It was a pity, but it could not be helped. He eased his conscience, which would not be perfectly quiet, by sending Mary an affectionate letter and fifty pounds, which, like a wise woman, she kept and added to her savings. To the letter she replied, blaming herself for being so set in her ways. Therein she did violence to her sense of truthfulness, but she made George much happier. He promised himself that he would go to see her from time to time at the house in Broadstairs which she had taken and where she proposed to let lodgings. He wished her good luck and proceeded to forget this unfortunate incident.

He was, I repeat, very much in love.

(2)

Meanwhile Doll had not been idle and the search for the new house had been prosecuted with vigour and success.

If Mrs. Brackett had not proved generous to her child, Doll would certainly have moved into London, but to the

owner of a motor-car (which Doll meant to be) Hampstead is as convenient as anywhere else. Doll could not suppose that any of the people whose acquaintance she was going to make would be unprovided with motor-cars; accordingly, the small trouble in reaching Hampstead which confronts those who use public conveyances did not enter into her calculations. She found Hampstead a pleasant place, with a sweet air, an agreeable exercise ground, and an Historical and Artistical flavour. George liked Hampstead and the only wish that he had expressed in this matter of choosing a house had been that they should stay, if possible, in The Fortunate Suburb.

Doll knew very little about the social values of the districts of London. Kensington South and Kensington West, Bayswater, Hampstead, Pimlico, or Bloomsbury, these were to her but names, void of special significance. Mayfair alone meant anything to her, and of Mayfair she spoke to George. But he laughed at the very notion of their living in Mayfair—indeed, it amused him considerably, as it must amuse any sensible person whose income is not exorbitant and whose days are spent in painting, and Doll abandoned the idea at once, if a little regretfully.

In Hampstead, therefore, she began to search, and it was not long before she had decided upon a charming old house, close to the Heath, in a quiet road of lime-trees and delightful walled gardens. Among these gardens the garden of The Lawn was not the least delightful. There was only one bathroom, as in George's house, but what were plumbers for if not to put three extra bathrooms into houses that need them? There was no garage, but what were builders for? And while they were about it, they

could put up a studio for George, since there was nothing of the kind ready to hand. The drawing-room, dining-room, and her little boudoir required nothing but redecoration, and her bedroom had the morning sun, as (so Mrs. Brackett insisted) was essential.

Yes, when the motor-car should have been bought and the garage built and the baths put in and the whole place done up properly, — oh, yes! and George's studio made somewhere, — Doll thought that she would find herself very comfortable. And to this effect she wrote to her mother.

From America Mrs. Brackett showered advice upon her child. She knew nothing of the conditions which prevail in England and cared less. For her it was enough that Doll should be housed perfectly. Some of her suggestions were good, others bad, when offered to people in the position of George and Doll; but since every one of them was accompanied by promises of financial support, — she had practically given Doll *carte blanche*, — Doll saw no reason to vex her mother by refusing to meet her wishes. George's jealousy of Mrs. Brackett's generosity was not strong enough to force him into rebellion. Doll was so happy in all the arrangements which she was making that he could not do other than agree to them. To have refused Mrs. Brackett's money would have been churlish and would have hurt Doll bitterly. But he was firmly resolved that, once the house was prepared, there should be an end of Mrs. Brackett's subsidies. He would regard all this as a sort of extra wedding-gift that her mother was offering to Doll. The allowance, he supposed, must continue and from time to time presents of value must be accepted; but nothing more on this scale. For

the future he proposed alone to meet the expenses of their establishment.

Meanwhile he got on with his painting and was pleased to find that the demand for it increased steadily. Therefore he was very busy and had a perfect excuse for leaving the preparation of the new house almost entirely in Doll's hands, a thing he was not sorry to do. Personally he was very well satisfied with the house in which he then lived and had no wish to move into anything bigger or finer; but Doll was eager for a better place and Doll's wishes were law. Certainly the new house would be very much pleasanter for Doll, and no doubt the studio which she promised him, and of which he had seen and approved the plans, would be every bit as good, if not a great deal better, than that in which he had worked so long and so happily.

Doll was happy; that was the main point. True, Mrs. Brackett, rather than himself, was responsible for this happiness. It did n't matter. He refused to be small-minded. Doll was happy and busy and loving, whenever he saw her, which was not, perhaps, as often as he could have wished. But when all this house trouble was over, when she should no longer be perpetually on the run between Tottenham Court Road and Regent Street and their present house and the new one, when the telephone-bell should cease to sound every five minutes of the day and the drawing-room cease to be littered with curtain patterns and wall-paper patterns and books of designs connected with plumbing and electrical fittings, — when, in a word, they should at last find themselves installed at The Lawn, with all their new possessions about them and all the bills paid by Mrs. Brackett, then he would return

to his tranquil enjoyment of that good artist's life which had always been his.

And now — *now* — Doll would share it with him.

At first he had taken some part in the selection of those wall-papers, carpets, and other things by which he was going to be surrounded; but he quickly discovered that Doll's taste in these matters was excellent and that he could safely leave her and the first-rate tradesmen whom she was employing to decide such matters between them. This furnishing, after all, was her affair, her amusement, far more than his; her mother was paying for it all, and, so long as he was convinced that Doll would not err seriously, there was good reason for him to abstain from interference. He found it, moreover, inexpressibly tiresome to examine wall-papers. Women have been made, by a careless Providence, immune from fatigue while shopping; but men are less strongly built and George was glad to find so many arguments in favour of his shirking.

So he shut himself up with his work, looked forward to happier times, and let Doll do what she pleased, confident that the house which she would provide would be in every respect ideal, if only because she would be living there.

Until her new motor-car should be ready, Doll contented herself with a hired one, for it was not to be supposed that she could use the Tube Railway for her continual expeditions into London. George saw this clearly, of course. Like most people he had no love for the Tube Railways of London and avoided them as far as was possible. Certainly their used-up, germ-laden air was not for his Doll to breathe. And perhaps it was cheaper to hire a

private car for the afternoon than to run about in cabs all the time. In any case, it was pleasanter for Doll; and he had more commissions this spring than ever before. And Doll's own car would be ready soon, and then it would be only a question of the chauffeur's wages and the petrol and the expenses of wear and tear. You could n't get a house furnished without spending money and the hire of this motor-car was an essential part of the cost. And what would it amount to after all? Twenty pounds? Thirty pounds? Fifty pounds? He should hope that he was prepared to spend that much to enable Doll to get about London comfortably during a month or so.

Thus did George argue victoriously with Caution, who retired, abashed, if not utterly destroyed.

But a cloud, though it was no bigger than a girl's hand, was now in his sky, and when Doll drove away, each morning or afternoon, kissing her fingers to him where he stood in the doorway, his pleasure in her pleasure could not wholly abolish a small feeling of uneasiness, which accompanied him back to the studio. But that always soon passed away.

The truth is that Doll had only a very elementary idea of the use of money. She knew that it was intended to be spent and beyond that she troubled her head very little about it. Never in her life had she known the disillusionment of having to refuse herself any desire of her heart and she lived under the belief that money was provided for mankind in the same easy and generous way as fresh air. I suppose that if she had ever asked herself how it happened that there were so many poor, shabbily dressed people about the streets, she would have been rather at a loss to give any explanation of this circumstance; but she

never did ask herself any such thing. That only the Mercy of Luck stood between herself and starvation it could never have occurred to her to think. As much money as ever she needed had always been at her command and that was all that she required of life. Why should she worry about other people and their possible failure to be satisfied? There is nothing like solid wealth for dulling the imagination. A sandwich-man, for instance, finds no difficulty in making the most wonderful plans for the disposal of wealth, should it ever come to him. All about him he sees valuable and delightful objects which are beyond his power to possess; but his eye covets them easily. For a wealthy young woman, on the other hand, it is almost impossible to consider how she would spend a shilling a day, if this should ever become the limit of her income. From the evidences of poverty with which she is surrounded her glance turns distastefully, and what the eye seeth not the heart grieveth not for.

The allowance for housekeeping which George gave Doll was ample for their needs, but even so, once the good Mary Bates was out of the house, the weekly sum which Doll set aside was often exceeded. It was not that she fed her household very extravagantly, though oysters and lobsters and crabs figured largely upon her menus, because, being an American from New York, she was accustomed to regard such things as among the necessities of life. But she gave no study in any direction to the contemptible science of thrift. She paid her books without examining them. Her new cook swindled her, reaping great commissions. Her new housemaid ordered brushes and soap and things of the kind to an extent which no mistress worthy of the name could have tolerated. The

bills grew bigger, week by week, and Doll did n't even notice it. Her one desire, when bill-paying day came round, was to draw the cheques and be done with it. She thought all that sort of thing sordid and dull; there was no romance for Doll in an account for joints delivered and eaten; though how much there may have been for a more searching eye than hers, who shall say? In only one respect did she approach the ideal which most of us have of the housewife. She paid regularly and never let her bills run over. And on this she prided herself not a little, supposing that, this done, nothing was lacking to make her a model of economy.

In small, odd purchases, also, she contrived to get rid of a great deal of money. Commonly she would bring home from London something for George, a basket of muscatels, a box of cigars, a pair of rush bath-slippers, a set of gold studs, a new book, a walking-stick, a comic toy. So long as they struck her fancy the cost of these things did n't matter. Five pounds, five shillings, or five pence — it was all one to Doll. She liked to bring things home to George, poor darling, working away alone in that old studio all day; she had the money to indulge any caprice; and she was fundamentally unable to discover any reason against her doing so.

She bought also, naturally enough, innumerable things for herself; a fan, a bottle of scent, a tortoise-shell comb, a this, a that.

For these things she paid out of her housekeeping allowance until it was all gone; then she drew on her dress allowance, and then on her allowance from Mrs. Brackett. There was, in her eyes, no difference between these funds. They were all money.

And as Mrs. Brackett's allowance was considerable (the other two were not inconsiderable either), and as Doll was, with all her fondness for spending, no plunger, she nearly always kept within her limits and was never, or hardly ever, overdrawn at the bank.

Yet this is not to say that she was making a success of the duties of the partnership which fell to her.

But George — spoilt for economy by his devoted Bates as Doll had been by her mother — thought that she was and there was no one to tell him the contrary.

In these days, too, Hilda and Otis Gardner, who were to be married early in June, were full of occupation. Otis had found deer-hunting in the New Forest, and England generally, so much to his liking that he had decided to add a house in London to his many other possessions. He was cursed with few relatives and those he had he did not much like; he had no business except to take care of his very large investments; and he had no wish whatever to increase his fortune. Such people do exist, even in America. It would be enough for Otis if he crossed the Atlantic once a year, spent a few days with his lawyer and a few weeks or months with Hilda among the lakes and streams of those mountain wildernesses which are the most priceless possession of his country. Yes, his camp in the Adirondack solitudes would shelter them very happily when they should feel the need of hunting a little more primitive than that which Brockenhurst could offer them. But 'New York was n't his idea of a city,' said Otis, which was very unpatriotic of him; but what can you expect from a man who goes abroad for his wife?

So Hilda had occasion often to be in London. She generally made two days of it, coming early from Brocken-

hurst, staying the night with George and Doll, and leaving next day by a late train. Mrs. March came only once. She was hard to move from her home and the accommodation for visitors in the little Hampstead house was limited, making it necessary for the mother and daughter to occupy the same room. This vexed Doll, with her large American ideas of hospitality; but she comforted herself with the reflection that the new house would enable her to entertain guests much more satisfactorily.

Otis always came, immediately after breakfast, in his own car, and carried Hilda off for their day's shopping. This also vexed Doll because the car of Otis was an infinitely finer one than her hireling; but again she comforted herself with the thought of the beautiful car of which she would presently be mistress, and generally her first visit, on reaching London, was to the makers of that car.

Again, it irritated Doll that she had nobody to go about shopping with her. If Hilda had had no escort she would not have minded at all; but to see Hilda going off with Otis made her feel forlorn. She had never been accustomed to loneliness when shopping, because her mother or some young man had always been at her disposal. She wished often that George was not so busy just then, or that she had made a little more difficulty about letting him leave everything to her quite so much as he was doing. It was not that she needed George's help in deciding on the details of her furnishing, and she quite understood that he must not neglect his painting; but had he been sometimes with her in her car when she encountered Otis and Hilda (as she often did), it would have been pleasanter. She felt that Otis and Hilda, as they passed on

their way, might be questioning George's devotion. She did not like that idea at all. Naturally she knew that George was entirely devoted, but she wanted the rest of the world to know it too. The thought that anybody could possibly have any doubts about it was exceedingly painful to her and spoiled a good deal of the pleasure which she took in her consultations with salesmen. Had this been America there would have been nothing remarkable in her being always alone in the shops. American husbands were not supposed to accompany their wives anywhere until after business hours. But in these London shops, as often as not, the shoppers were in couples, obviously married. Men seemed to have nothing to do in England but to go about with their wives. And she was always alone. Several times she cried, going home to Hampstead in her hired car.

Otis and Hilda had taken a charming little house in Mayfair, the income of Otis enabling him to live exactly where and how he pleased. It was a bitter moment for Doll when this decision was made known to her.

She had seriously supposed that Mayfair was inaccessible to any one except noblemen with at least twenty thousand a year. For this were to be blamed her ignorance of London, George's amusement when she had spoken of Mayfair as a possible alternative to Hampstead, and, lastly, the fact that she, Doll, could not live there. If it was not for the likes of her, Doll, what an astonishingly select place it must be!

And now it appeared that it was for the likes of Hilda and Otis. Otis, whom she had refused! Hilda, her sister-in-law!

If it had been possible, Doll would have abandoned

The Lawn; but it was not possible. The lease was signed; the decorations and alterations were already under way; and she had to make the best of it, poor girl. At any rate, Hilda would have no garden. That was one comfort.

She never allowed George to guess how miserable she had been made by this decision of Otis and Hilda to settle in Mayfair; not because she was unwilling to grieve George by showing discontent, but because her pride would not let her do it. She was in for the Hampstead house and she was not going to permit anybody to imagine that she had made a mistake. So she set herself resolutely to the task of surmounting the dismal impression which had been made upon her; told herself that Hilda's house was a pokey, dark little place, anyway, even if it *was* in Grosvenor Street; and presently almost succeeded in persuading herself that Hampstead was a very much more delightful district than Mayfair; but she never quite did this, and the seed of a resolve to inhabit that region lay dormant thenceforward in her heart.

On the whole, however, her first months of married life were busy and happy enough. Many people called upon her and she had many calls to repay. There were dinners and dances and lunches and 'At Homes' and all the rest of it to attend with George; and the new house provided her with much interesting occupation. And she was spending money with both hands. An active life always suited her and she daily grew more and more lovely. Daily George blessed his lucky stars more and more fervently.

And in the early summer Mrs. Brackett was to arrive from America to help Doll with the removal.

CHAPTER V

(1)

DICK CREWE came home in April, lean, burned by the sun of Africa, and in a very healthy condition of body. Killing savage beasts is a well-known remedy for heart-sickness, and it very often works a radical cure; but in many cases it fails, like other medicines, if its use is discontinued. That is a risk which a man has to take; it is obviously impossible to spend the rest of one's life trailing about the wilderness and exploding cartridges in the direction of lions and what-not. After a certain (or rather, uncertain) point big-game shooting becomes intolerable to a civilized being, and his wish to enjoy the comforts of home becomes father to the thought that it is safe for him to return there. Especially if he is in hard physical condition is his confidence likely to be strong. Dick's was complete that Doll could no longer disturb his peace of mind; but he had enough caution left in him to prevent him from making any advance towards the renewal of his acquaintance with her. He was three days in Beaulieu before Hilda heard of his arrival from somebody whom she met on the road, and next day he received an upbraiding letter from her and a command to come instantly to Brockenhurst and report. In order to prove to himself how perfectly cured he was, he did this, was welcomed with open arms by the two March ladies, and was given all the news. He expressed himself delighted to hear that Hilda was engaged to Otis Gardner, whom

he vaguely remembered, and that the Georges were so happy. He was told about the Mayfair house and The Lawn and learned that the wedding was to be on such a day and that the Georges expected to move about such a time and many other things which Hilda and her mother thought would interest him.

Hilda brought from the piano and showed to him a large photograph of Doll in her wedding-gown, with bouquet and veil and all the rest of it. He said that it was excellent — excellent. Then it was put back on the piano and he was required to tell them all about his exploits in Africa. This he did, bringing in the pair of horns which he had carried with him in his dogcart from Beaulieu for Mrs. March. He stayed an hour in all and when he went away could have told you very little of what had been said. He knew that he had talked a great deal and that only twice had his eyes strayed to the piano. Only twice. He told himself that this proved him to be safe. Of course he was safe. Wasn't she George's wife now, damn it! Of course he was safe. Yes, it had been a very sound move, that — going to Africa. Yes; he was all right now, thank God!

Three days later he received a letter from George. Hilda, it appeared, had announced his return; and when was he coming to London? And when he did, if he should fail to roll up and take a meal with them, George would have his life. Lunch was at 1, dinner at 7.30, and they could put him up for the night almost any time.

Dick replied saying that, having been so long from home, he found a great deal to do and that it might be some time before he would be able to go to London; but that when he did he would surely come down upon George

and Mrs. George for a dinner or a luncheon. He did his best to believe that this letter was an additional proof of his cure, because, had he not been cured, he would have either gone straight up to London next day or departed instantly for Africa or elsewhere. He overlooked the fact that he had nothing whatever to keep him in Beaulieu and that upon this everything depended. But when we are deceiving ourselves we commonly overlook something. We are obliged to.

And so the poor young man mooned about Beaulieu and its neighbourhood for the best part of a week, reading aloud to his mother, wheeling her round the garden, holding skeins for her, exercising his horses, and taking up the threads of friendship with which The Forest was full. He was seen at Lyndhurst and Burley, at Lymington and Christchurch, at Ringwood and Cadnam; but the peace of the lovely country through which he rode was not in his soul, and his stableman knew how hard the beast had been pushed — if Dick himself did not.

At length he had done as much as was necessary (or possible) to demonstrate his total lack of eagerness in this affair, and, on an evening, he told his mother that he had n't a decent suit of clothes left and that an interview with his tailor had become inevitable; and next day he entered the morning express for London and slept all the way to Waterloo, not because his mind was easy, but because he had just spent a night of complete wakefulness.

As he fell asleep he told himself that it was very doubtful if he would find time to look old George up on this occasion; very doubtful, indeed. He had a host of things to do besides ordering clothes. He must positively get his hair cut, for instance.

Arrived in London he very dutifully visited his tailor and very conscientiously examined a great number of cloth patterns, and, because he dreaded to go out of the shop, ordered about twice as many suits as he needed. His tailor was delighted with him. But at last he was obliged to leave the good man.

He hastened to his barber and had his hair cut and was shampooed and singed and manicured and would have had his face massaged if he could have endured any more of it. As he left the shop, he said to himself, "I'll lunch at the club"; and, as he stepped into the first cab that presented itself, he gave the address of George's house in Hampstead.

It would be a cad's game, he reflected, to be in London without looking dear old George up.

(2)

Yes, said the maid, Mr. March was at home. He was in the studio. No, he was not engaged. And what name should she say? Sir Richard Crewe? Would he wait in the drawing-room for a moment?

In George's bachelor days the drawing-room of this house of his had been something of a joke. On first setting up his establishment, with Mary Bates to look after him, money had not been too plentiful with George. The studio it was necessary to furnish well; the dining-room came off a little less comfortably; George's bedroom received only the simplest necessaries; and the drawing-room was left as bare as your hand. What did a bachelor painter want with a drawing-room?

And so, while every improvement in his circumstances

was reflected at once in the studio, the dining-room, and the bedroom, 'the drawing-room' remained always in the same sad condition, until the antique furniture and other paintable objects which George was always buying, in case they should some day come in handy for a picture, overflowed the inhabited chambers of the house. Then did 'the drawing-room' begin at last to be furnished. But in what a way! Everything of which George had for the time wearied was slung into 'the drawing-room' to make way for new acquisitions. As he had no conceivable use for a drawing-room he had no reason to spend money in making it habitable; but it was just the place for furniture that did n't happen to be wanted. In a few years 'the drawing-room' was stuffed with heaped things like a curiosity shop. It had become a store. George kept his bicycle in it and crates and packing-cases and old pictures that he had painted, and old pictures that some one else had painted, and broken-down tables, and bureaus, and tallboys, and some bits of armour, and a superannuated lay figure, and a few plaster casts on a shelf, and I don't know what more. At one end he had a carpenter's bench where he used to tinker at the old frames that he was always buying.

This Gehenna was always carefully called 'the drawing-room.' Bachelors have many ways of trumpeting their independence and this was one of George's. At first the name was intentionally comic; but, after a few years, the humour had worn off it altogether, and neither George nor Mary Bates ever thought of smiling when George told Mary to take some discarded thing and put it in 'the drawing-room.' Or he might say to a visitor who should ask about the characteristics of Heppelwhite furniture,

"Come into the drawing-room — I've got a broken-down chair in there that'll show you what I mean." And he would not be conscious any longer that his visitor might receive a surprise when he should go in.

Dick, of course, had often been in George's 'drawing-room,' and, when the maid invited him to wait there while she carried his card to the studio, the memory which the name evoked was so vivid that for the moment he could hardly believe his ears. What kind of a fool of a girl was this that they had got who put visitors into 'the drawing-room'? But before he had properly formulated this thought he had passed through the door and knew that if, of the girl and himself, one was a fool, it was n't the girl.

Doll had made a very dainty place for herself out of the long, low room. In default of the hardwood floor which, as a good American, she would have desired (there was to be one in the drawing-room at The Lawn), she had put up with cool, light-green matting on which, here and there, she had strewed, after looting them from the studio, some excellent Oriental rugs. The walls were covered with a cloth paper of the same colour as the matting. There were some good pictures by George and other men — further spoil from the studio. The wooden furniture was the best that George had been able to provide from his store, and all about the room were large bowls of fine porcelain, filled with spring flowers. The sofa and easy-chairs were covered with a pretty chintz. A convex mirror reflected charmingly the whole length of the room, with its French window and the little garden beyond. The writing-desk stood open, littered with correspondence. On top of it were three photographs, one

of George, one of Mrs. Brackett, and one of Doll, as a baby. Here, too, was Doll's telephone. On a table was the wedding photograph which Dick had seen at Brockenhurst. Beside the sofa stood a small table; on it a magazine and an ash-tray in which was the stump of a cigarette. Some cushions, heaped up at one end, yet bore the impress of Doll's body. Close by, the *Times* lay on the floor; and on top of it languished a pair of small white kid gloves, tried on, found wanting, and thrown down.

The sense of her presence was so strong that Dick could hardly believe that the room was empty, and his eye searched every part of it carefully before he was convinced that she was not there. When this was certain he sighed a sigh of honest relief. He had become aware of being unready to meet her and for a moment a panic impulse laid hold of him to run out of the house and make his quickest way back to Beaulieu. But such a proceeding was too absurd to be contemplated and the impulse passed as quickly as it came. No, he was in for it now and he would have to go through with it. Nor could he say whether he was glad or sorry. Doing his best to recover his confidence, he strolled to the window, humming, and looked out into the garden. This removed his eyes from those little white gloves.

Feet thundered on the stairs, the door burst open, and the happy George arrived, his arms open and loud exclamations issuing from him. Dick was made welcome and dragged instantly up to the studio, where they found a huge and very fat old man, of debauched appearance, exchanging a fur-bordered robe, a velvet cap, and an elaborate gold chain for his own greenish and shiny overcoat.

"Hawkins," said George, "this is your lucky day. You draw two hours' pay for twenty minutes' work. Here's your money and don't get so drunk that you can't turn up to-morrow. And now, outside! I'm busy."

The Old Iniquity took something like a hat between his hands and bowed himself out. George wheeled his wet canvas into a corner, talking all the time.

"Let me first get rid of this thing; it's not worth your looking at it yet, but it's going to do, I think. That old blackguard's my latest discovery. He sweeps a crossing in Camden Town, near a shop where they sometimes have a decent bit of glass. I was down there the other day and engaged Mr. Hawkins on the spot. I've long wanted some one to fit that burgess's robe and chain of office that I got in Zurich last summer. *Did* you twig the Newgate-frill of the venerable Hawkins? Oh, he's a very precious old person, and just now I live in terror lest he should walk under an illuminated County Council Tram, going full speed, because he fancies that it is the last pub on his way home. I don't know what I should do at all if I lost Hawkins. — Well, take a pew, Dickie. You've got to tell me all about yourself, you know; no shirking. From the time you landed to the time you left."

"O Lord!" said Dick, "you don't want to hear all that rot. I just went out and killed a lot of beasts and came home again. You're the fellow who's had the adventures. They seem to have been agreeing with you, my lad. You're getting fat, George."

Thus Dick, in amiable platitudes; and all the time his eyes were endeavouring not to look at a small and very beautiful oil portrait of Doll that hung over George's writing-desk.

"Agreeing with me," cried George, "I should think they have." He forgot that he was supposed to be intensely curious about Dick's hunting and proceeded to amplify his last assertion.

Dick listened and smoked and nodded and strove to keep his eyes away from Doll's portrait.

"I see," said George, "that you're looking at that little head I did of her. It's nothing, of course, but it helped me to pass a few hours of the waiting last winter; and when it was done it gave me a sort of promise, whenever I looked at it, that she was coming here by and by. If I had n't had it I should have gone melancholy mad. Oh, Dickie, why don't you do the wise thing? The girl's waiting for you somewhere and you'll find her if you look for her. I know you've your mother and that you think your first duty's to her, but it is n't, old man; and she'd tell you the same. I'll bet she has many times. If you got married, she'd be the happiest woman alive; I'm sure of it. Oh, it's awful to think of a good chap like you without a wife."

Dick laughed, quite successfully. He felt much more at ease now. George's complete happiness seemed to make everything so perfectly safe; whereas, if George had not been happy — But it was useless to think about that. George *was* happy; George was his oldest friend; and there was an end of it. Good luck to George! God be with him and his wife!

Dick felt that he was now quite able to meet Doll. He had himself definitely in hand. He was glad he had come. Dear old George! Bless him! And her too!

So he laughed and said, "There was once a fox which lost his tail, you know" — which was perhaps not a par-

ticularly original thing to say, but for that Dick cared very little.

"Ass!" shouted George. "Blasphemous and ungrateful ass! But go your own blind way. It's your own funeral. And when you're an old livery, bald blighter in a bath-chair, with not a soul on earth to care whether you live or die, don't come complaining to me. It'll be too late then, my son. *Now* is the accepted time."

"And when I think," said Dick, "that not a year ago —"

"*I* know. *I* know. And I only hope that a year hence I can say that to you, Dickie. Oh, we're all blind as bats until it happens and then — well, the world's a new place, that's all. Life's a new thing. The sky's painted a new blue, by God!" He walked in the studio, spouting divine absurdities and his voice trembled with an enthusiasm, to know which it is worth any man's while to be born into this unlucky world.

Though Dick was in love with his oldest friend's wife he was none the less a thoroughly good fellow. His most fundamental desire at this time was to be free from this terrible thing, and only the less honest part of him (we all have it, my brothers) said 'Yea' to it. And this was the weaker part, so far. Therefore, anything which would help him to rejoice, rather than writhe, because George was happily married, was welcome, and, as such, he welcomed these extravagances of George. He bent his mind to the task of being glad and positively succeeded. But the mind is very little concerned in such affairs as this.

Soon he felt so strong and righteous that he said presently, breaking in upon George's observations, "I hope I'm to see Mrs. George." But his voice shook.

His friend stopped in mid-career and flung his arms apart in a despairing gesture. "She's out," he said; "shopping. We move in a few weeks, and she's full of it, bless her! It's wonderful what a head that girl has, Dick, for all that sort of thing. She's taken on the whole business and she does it so thundering well that I just let her rip. And, of course, I've got to paint. But I'll be glad when it's all over, for I hardly ever see her during the day. And now here you are and she's in London. It's rotten. But you're staying here to-night, of course. You'll see her when she gets home."

A wave of thankfulness passed over Dick. He was not going to see her; not this time.

He shook his head quickly. "No," he said, "I did n't bring a bag. I really did n't mean to come out here to-day; just ran up to get some clothes. But I could n't go back without a look at you."

"I should think not," cried George indignantly; "and I'd never have forgiven you if you'd gone and sneaked off like that. But what an old ass you were, not to bring a bag! Did n't I tell you we could put you up almost any time? It's only when Hilda comes for the night that we're full. When we move into the new house things'll be better, and then you've got to make this your London home as you used to do. But of *course* you can stay the night. I can lend you pyjamas and we can get you anything else you want in Hampstead this afternoon. It'll break Doll's heart if she comes back and finds you gone."

"No," said Dick, "next time, old man. I promised my mother I'd be home for dinner."

"Send her a telegram."

"No. Can't be done, George. It'd upset her. She'll

have made up her mind for her game of picquet, you know, and I can't disappoint her, even for you people. She's so damned pleased to have me back again, poor darling. I'd no business to be away all that time. I'm afraid I can't hope to have her with me very much longer. She's failed a good deal since I went away." He was perfectly sincere in all this, but he was conscious of being glad that he had an unanswerable excuse. If his mother had been in her usual health he would have had to stay the night in Hampstead: there would have been no help for it. I suppose there is truth in the proverb which credits every cloud with a silver lining. Truly it is an odd thing, this human heart, which can be glad that an adored mother is so unwell that it is impossible to do something which is ardently desired and horribly feared.

Against Dick's argument George had nothing to advance; but he called down curses upon the luck which forbade Dick to see Doll. "She grows lovelier every day," he assured his friend. "Heavens alive! I declare to you, Dick, she makes me gasp. I would n't have believed there was such beauty walking about this common earth. And to think that I — I —" and so forth. George would not have carried on in this way with everybody; but Dick was a very close friend, and a truly sympathetic ear is a great temptation to a man who is surcharged with emotion the pressure of which he finds few opportunities to relieve. He could not, for instance, possibly have said all this to either his mother or Hilda. It is not always our nearest and dearest who are most sympathetic.

Dick let him talk. He was not going to see Doll and a great peace had fallen about him. The trial that he had dreaded was postponed. He had faced it and it had been

spared to him. The future must take care of itself, but the present was safe. Thank God for this new house that had caused her to go into London to-day!

They left the studio and lunched together very happily. George, who was hungry, ceased to rhapsodise about his wife and drew Dick out on his African adventures. Dick was glad to speak of them and did so at length.

They were halfway through their cigars when George proposed that they should stroll round and have a look at the new house. Dick agreed. He had still an hour before he must start to catch his train at Waterloo. They were soon at The Lawn.

The house was in the chaotic state which builders and decorators produce. In this room the floor was being laid in Doll's esteemed hardwood; in the next they were hanging the paper; in the next they were painting or placing wires for the electric light. Here a bath was being put into a dressing-room; there a food-lift was being constructed between the kitchen and the dining-room. Men in white coats were everywhere; plumbers exercised their mysterious craft, their legs protruding from recesses dimly lit by candle ends; there were men laying bricks and men building fireplaces and the scent of the house was compounded of paste and gas and fresh paint and burning paint and unwashed labourers.

George led his friend from one point of interest to another and the theme of his song was ever his Doll and his Doll's wonderful cleverness. If Dick had not been in love with the girl he would surely have grown to hate her.

They visited every inch of the house and the great new studio. It was already built (though much remained still

to be done inside it) against the house in a part of the garden where it would not be greatly in the way of garden-parties. Very fortunately this happened to be on the north side of the house. You entered this studio through the old window at one end of the upstairs corridor, which, for the rest, was sufficiently lit by a skylight. There was another entrance, in the garden, for models or persons who should come to carry pictures in and out, and underneath was to be a billiard-room when, as George explained, "it would run to it." The garage was elsewhere, near the side entrance, and was practically complete. George pointed out that there was accommodation for two cars, "but of course one must be enough, just at present," he said.

Dick said that he must be moving and George after a few protestations said that well, he supposed he must.

As they came back from the garden into the hall by the back door, the front door opened and Doll appeared, all in dark furs.

"Here's a stroke of luck," said George, the good man.

(3)

Doll was delighted to see Dick. She would have remembered him perfectly, even if Hilda's report of his return to Beaulieu had not recently led her and George to talk about him once or twice. He had been very agreeable to her in the past autumn on the few occasions when they had met. She knew that he had been in Africa and she recollected that his mother was an invalid. So she was not at a loss for a few observations of a friendly nature and these she delivered in her most amiable manner.

As George's oldest friend, Sir Richard Crewe deserved some attention. She asked after his mother and whether he was glad to be home and what he thought of their new house and if he had seen it all? Dick heard himself saying, in reply, that his mother was fairly well and that he was very glad to be home and that he thought the house magnificent and that he believed he had seen it all. It was to him exactly as if some one else said these things. He, Dick Crewe, stood by and adored the miracle of Doll, all in dark furs. Some one else attended to the sense of her questions and to the work of answering them; Dick Crewe was concerned rather with the music of her voice.

Doll had not come to the house to waste her time over any Dick Crewe. Civility satisfied, she turned to business. George and his Dick Crewe might come with her if they pleased, but *she* had a whole bunch of things to do in the house. Picking up her skirts, she began to mount the dirty stairs, with a smile to George and a smile to Dick and a "You'd better take him home, George, now. I'll be round in half an hour to give you tea." She did n't need either of them a bit.

"I am just off," said Dick. "I've a train to catch at Waterloo. So good-bye, Mrs. George."

"Why," she said, "that's too bad. Well, good-bye. Come again soon, Sir Richard." With a last smile she vanished through a doorway on the first landing and they could hear her speak to a man who was at work in there. What she said to him and what she had said to Dick formed practically one continuous sentence.

George went down the steps and Dick followed him, grinding his teeth tightly together.

In an instant all his confidence had been stripped from him, all the fine make-believe defence which, these months past, he had been building so laboriously against this moment was blown to shreds: cobweb ramparts, streaming before the blast of desire. It was a lie that he was cured. It was a lie that he was safe. He was still a very sick man and he was in very deadly danger. He loved her utterly and George was his best friend.

At the bottom step he stumbled and George, with a laugh, caught his arm and begged him not to break his neck. They did n't want to begin housekeeping with a funeral. "Doll would never forgive you," he said, "if you spoiled her new toy like that."

At the garden gate Dick tried to get away, but the good George must needs see him as far as the Tube station and so, for another five minutes, the poor devil had to endure his friend's chatter, laugh when he laughed, and say a word or two now and then. George noticed nothing. Why should he? He was in love.

Dick went straight to the lift, forgetting to buy a ticket, and the lift man denied him admittance. While he bought the ticket, George stood by chaffing him on having forgotten the ways of civilisation. "It was high time you came back from Africa," said George. "Ha, ha!" said George.

At last the lift carried him into the earth, away from George and his jolly smile and his invitations to come again soon and not to forget his bag next time.

He stumbled out of the lift, went down the stairs and ran blindly into a train which stood on the wrong side of the platform. It carried him to Golder's Green and cast him out there to wait five minutes for another train that

would take him back through Hampstead to Waterloo. Circumstance is always alert to bully the distraught.

At Waterloo he pulled himself together sufficiently to find the right train for Beaulieu Road. It was just about to depart and he jumped into the first empty carriage. His whole being cried out for solitude. Strange and horrible impulses moved in him to clench his fists and raise his arms into the air, to kick and to bite and to shriek, and an English gentleman cannot do these things while he is subject to observation. He did not mean to do them if he could help it, but, in case they should become too strong for him, he wanted solitude. He no longer trusted himself in anything. He was demoralised, and he knew it, and bitter shame burned him. For you are to remember always that this was an honourable man by whose code of life the person that he had now become was only to be judged as utterly abhorrent. Everything considered, solitude was greatly to be desired.

(3)

As the train started, the door of the compartment opened hastily and a young man, carrying a suitcase, jumped in, slammed the door and dropped, panting lightly, into a corner. He dried his brow, lit a cigarette, and then suddenly stretched out his hand.

“Sir Richard Crewe.” The voice and accent were American.

Dick would gladly have destroyed him. Instead of which he was obliged to say, “Yes?” in a tone of polite enquiry.

“You don’t remember me. I’m Otis Gardner. We

met once or twice last autumn at Brockenhurst. At Mrs. March's, you know."

The fellow Hilda March was going to marry. It was necessary to be civil.

"Of course," said Dick. "How are you?" He did n't care how he was, but this was the proper thing to say. He found himself shaking hands with this Gardner person and remembering that he had thought him a very decent fellow on those few occasions when they had met.

Otis had had time for a little observation and something that he saw in the haggard face opposite him caused him to regret having spoken.

Therefore, "Now, see here, Sir Richard," he said, "I don't know how you feel about talking in the train, but if you don't want to, just say so right away. I have a book in my grip. If talking suits you it suits me; but I know what a train bore is, and I've no wish to play that part during the next two hours."

The eye of Otis was grey and steady and humorous; his voice was quiet and cultivated; and his proposal was frank and original. Suddenly Dick knew that it would be much better for him to talk to this man than, by maintaining silence, to deliver his soul over to the devils within.

"Yes," he said, "let's talk by all means. Yes, let's talk, for God's sake," he repeated passionately.

Otis gave no slightest sign that he discovered anything unusual about this form of assent.

"That's fine," he said. "Shall we talk about you or about me? I understand you've been doing great things out in Africa?"

"Oh," said Dick somehow achieving a smile, "let's

talk about anything but me. *I* understand that *you've* been doing great things at Brockenhurst."

"Well," said Otis judicially, "that's the way *I* look at it."

"You're going there now, of course?"

"Of course," said Otis.

"I was so pleased," Dick went on, sincerely enough. "Hilda's a very good friend of mine. I congratulate you with all my heart." He put out his hand again (rather to his own surprise) and shook the hand of Otis vigorously. "I hear you're going to live in England," he observed. Already he was more than glad that Otis had come into his carriage. He could feel the devils subsiding one by one. There are men — even young men — whose mere vicinity is calming.

"That's so," said Otis. "Every one at home thinks me crazy for taking a house in London. They want to know what's the matter with little old New York, but *I* can't tell them. Have you ever been on the other side?"

No, Dick had never been in America.

"You must come some day," Otis went on, "and do some hunting in our woods. I've a camp in the mountains, you know. We'll be over there pretty often, I hope, and Hilda'll want to show it all to her English friends. And I hope you'll believe that *I* shall too." He smiled in his friendly way and Dick smiled in return and said that he would be on their track at the earliest opportunity.

They found themselves almost at once talking about sport of every kind, and their conversation, till they separated, was maintained at about the same level of amiable commonplace as was reached by its beginning.

Otis was not a brilliant person; no more was Dick for that matter. They were nothing more than two good, simple fellows, sharing certain rather primitive tastes. One of them talked in order not to think and the other because he suspected that that was what his companion wished to do.

For as he talked Otis was saying to himself, "Is it a girl or is it money or is it perhaps just fever? He's been a long spell in the middle of Africa, but that might point to a girl too. Well, whatever it is, he's got it bad, and I guess it's not my business anyway."

When they parted at Beaulieu Road Station Dick begged Otis to bring Hilda to lunch at Beaulieu on the morrow and Otis said that he would certainly try. Then Otis went on to Brockenhurst and Hilda; Dick, in his dogcart, to Beaulieu and torment. But by his talk with Otis he had been saved a most deplorable experience. Time had been given him to get control of himself. He had his devils once more by the throat.

He very much hoped that Gardner would be able to bring Hilda over to lunch in the morning. He wanted to see Gardner again as soon as possible. For an American, Gardner was an extraordinarily pleasant fellow.

Next morning, sure enough, Otis and Hilda arrived at Beaulieu. You will have already deduced, from the fact that Otis on the previous day used the train to transport him to Brockenhurst, that his motor-car was out of order. The day was a perfect one, sunny and cold. It follows, therefore, that Otis and Hilda rode.

Dick, mooning about in front of the house while he waited for his mother and her chair, saw them coming up the drive and a pang went through him as he realised

that the very last couple he had seen on horseback, in that particular place and under the morning sunlight, had been Doll and George on the day when they came over to breakfast to thank him for the loan of his mare. Everything at Beaulieu conspired to remind him of his misery. Though she had not been in the place more than once or twice, he knew every spot in his garden where she had set her foot. Her presence persisted in the house like some sweet odour. The neighbourhood of the abbey was intolerable to him by reason of the memories which were there evoked. She had sat on this stone, framed by this arch. He could see her still and read the delight in her sweet eyes as they roamed over the lovely ruins. Here he had given her his hand at a difficult place. Here he had bought picture postcards for her.

Dick knew Hilda's mare, Lorna, a mile away, and his reason told him that Gardner had kept his promise; but his unreason whispered to him, as he gazed, that this was Doll again.

"My God!" he said aloud, as he went to meet his visitors, "this won't do. I shall have to clear out of this place again if it goes on." His thoughts turned suddenly to Africa and the peace that he had once found in its wildernesses. "Yes," he said, "I can't stick it here. O God, I can't stick it here!"

With that he forced a smile to appear somehow upon his face and succeeded in making Hilda and Otis believe that he was honestly delighted to see them. Visitors, however, are always ready to believe themselves welcome; so his task was not as difficult as he thought it.

Lady Crewe appeared in her chair and the tour of the garden was made. Hilda was wise about gardens and the

two women had plenty to say to each other. Hilda pushed the chair and the two men went on ahead, for Dick, at any rate, was incapable of dawdling.

Otis, just for something to say, because his host was very silent, informed him that he was going to America very soon on business. Dick, before he could reflect said, "Lucky man!"

"Not at all," replied Otis. "On the contrary. Do you suppose I *want* to leave England just now? Why, I'm to be married in a month."

"So you are," said Dick. "Again, lucky man!"

"I won't deny it this time, Sir Richard," said Otis, smiling the fatuous smile of the perfectly happy person. "That's why I'm not disposed to welcome a fortnight away from England, just at present. Oh! it's going to be a lightning trip. Yes, sir." Then, after the easy way of people who are about to go several thousand miles by sea, "Better come along too," he said.

To his intense surprise Dick said slowly: "Do you know, I should n't wonder if I did come along. I expect there's some trout-fishing to be done over there, is n't there? Maine and so forth."

"Not yet," said Otis; "it's too early. But there soon will be. But that's great about your coming along. Do you mean it? I need n't say how glad I'd be of your company." He could hardly say anything else, could he?

"I'll think it over," said Dick. "Yes, I'll think it over, Gardner. When *will* there be trout-fishing?"

Otis told him. "And meanwhile," he said, "you can travel around in the South and West and see something of our wonderful land; and afterwards, after you've fished

some of those Maine ponds, you'll be just ready to come and join Hilda and me at the Adirondack camp for a spell. We're going straight there after we're married. A beeline for the woods for ours! And if you'll come, say in July some time, you'll find us all fixed up and ready to receive visitors."

Dick murmured something about his being too good, but he knew that the American was not making polite speeches. He meant what he said.

When Otis and Hilda had gone, Dick came into his mother's room and said, "Suppose I were to go away again for a bit, mother. Would you mind too much?"

It is not to be imagined that Lady Crewe had remained blind to the fact that her boy was unhappy. She was not that kind of mother. But she had never made any attempt to learn the cause of his unhappiness. Again, she was not that kind of mother. Perfect trust cannot pry. That Dick must behave well in all circumstances was an axiom. If, then, he suffered (as her ears and eyes told her a hundred times a day he did) and if he did not tell her why, she accepted his decision without complaint, without fear, and, above all, without curiosity. That he was in love and that things did not go well with him, this she knew, but not because he had told her so; and she was much too wise to suppose that she or any one else could do anything to help him. He must work out his own salvation. She assumed, of course, — being his mother, — that it would be salvation.

For a few days after his return from Africa she had hoped that the trouble was past; but that hope had not been of long life. Then came yesterday's journey to London, explained (so transparently to her) by the need of

new clothes, and their terrible dinner of last night, Dick, with a grey face and haggard eyes, laughing and joking so valiantly, and she, with a heart that was ready to break for him, joking and laughing in her turn. As for their picquet it had been impossible. Dick had pleaded a headache, thereby saving her the necessity of doing the same thing.

And so, when he came to her, announcing this fresh flight, she was in no way surprised, and had her answer ready.

"You know," she said, "that if I had my way you'd never be out of my sight, Dickie. You'd live on the end of a string, tied to this chair. I might let you go, now and then, as far as the front gate, but no farther, because of the motor-cars on the road, you know. Of course I shall miss you dreadfully; you know that; but —"

"I know," he said, "I know. I'm just a selfish beast. I won't go."

"Oh, yes, you will. It's not right for a young man like you to spend your whole life in a poky little spot like Beaulieu, wheeling an old woman about a garden, and occasionally hunting a poor deer through The Forest. That's no kind of life. You ought to be travelling constantly at your age. Why, I never was so pleased in all my days as when you went to Africa."

He smiled in spite of himself.

"May you be forgiven!" he said.

She laughed outright. "Oh, yes," she said, "I'll be forgiven, sure enough. Well, of course you know I did n't quite mean that; but seriously, Dickie, I want you to go about more than you have done. You've no right to let yourself stagnate. What's the good of having money and

health if you never see anything of this fine world of ours except one pretty little corner of your own pretty little country? So where are you off to this time?"

It is not difficult to argue a man into doing something which he wants to do. Lady Crewe knew this or perhaps she would not have tried.

CHAPTER VI

(1)

THE American mail brought the usual letter from Mrs. Brackett. Doll opened it, expecting to learn the definite date of her mother's sailing. What she discovered was something very much less pleasant. Mrs. Brackett announced her ruin.

The details of financial catastrophes are not of interest to intelligent people, unless those intelligent people happen to be involved in those financial catastrophes. As neither you nor I lose a penny by Mrs. Brackett's misfortunes I make no apology for sparing you a careful explanation of them. It is enough if I indicate a large sum of money left behind him by the late father of Doll, a widow totally ignorant of business affairs (because permitted by her husband to share none of his anxieties, but only the spoil of his successes), and a lawyer of unblemished reputation, but wholly deficient morality. Given these premises, the conclusion is certain, except in point of time. Mrs. Brackett might have lost her money two years earlier or ten years later than she did. That she would have lost it is beyond argument. But had the lawyer in question been able to keep on juggling the balls a little longer, it would undoubtedly have been more convenient for George March, because the catastrophe, by coming at this particular moment, made him liable for all the not inconsiderable expenses in which Doll, at her mother's command, had involved him.

This was his first thought as he read the letter which Doll had dumbly passed to him. His second was that Mrs. Brackett's allowance to Doll would now cease. This reflection was actually pleasant. As far as he, quite selfishly, was concerned, George did n't care a button that Mrs. Brackett had lost all her money. He had not married Doll with any eye to her possessions, present or future, and, as I have said, the baser, the jealous part of him had resented not a little the large additions to Doll's allowance which her mother had made and had intended to make. Well, there was to be no more of that. Pity for Mrs. Brackett now forced its way to the front. What hard luck! Poor dear little soul. He was surprised to find that he felt much more affectionate towards her, all of a sudden, than he had ever done before. She had let him in for a pretty lump of money (so his thoughts ran or, rather, galloped), but it was quite easy to forgive her that. Clearly she was n't to blame and the amount was not at all overwhelming. He was full of work just now and, if the same good state of affairs continued, it would take him and Doll not so very long — perhaps a couple of years, perhaps less, — exercising not too much economy, to clear their feet. That was nothing to break one's heart about.

George had once known, but had now forgotten, that economy is a thing much more easy to contemplate than to practise; so he could look forward to a couple of years of careful spending without any great alarm. He remembered that Doll had done splendidly hitherto as a house-keeper; she would continue to do splendidly. Yes, he had great confidence in Doll's ability to practise thrift, if necessary. Yes, it was very lucky that Doll was so clever,

because economy would decidedly have to be exercised for some little time. It was impossible to get rid of the new house, now that so much had been done to it, involving so many debts. Besides, professionally, it was going to be a good move. In such a house he would be able to put up his prices. No, they would have to stick to the new house.

But he was afraid the motor-car would have to be abandoned.

It was rather a comfort that Mrs. Brackett seemed to think she would not be wholly without resources. Something, so she wrote, would probably remain to her; at least her new lawyer hoped so. She would have her bare living, it appeared. She prayed it might be the case.

So did George. He would have quite enough to do without financing Mrs. Brackett.

Simultaneously with this reflection he finished reading the letter and turned resolutely to comfort his poor Doll.

She took the affair much more hardly than did George; as was, perhaps, natural, since her own mother was concerned and not her mother-in-law. Not that she realised what an immensely reduced income would mean to her mother; Doll was incapable of realising anything of the kind. But anybody who read Mrs. Brackett's letter could see that she was very much upset and alarmed and Doll had never known her mother in that state. Always Mrs. Brackett had been equal to every emergency; always she had been able to write cheques, as large as might be required, for everything; always she had been a strong rock of finance. And here she was, writing hysterically about being reduced to a crust, though to be sure she hinted a belief that the crust would prove enough for her actual

necessities. Visibly the strong rock tottered and shook and the spectacle was disconcerting.

Doll, moreover, had known the wicked lawyer all her life and had been very fond of him. She had not believed him to be beyond suspicion; she had never so much as connected him in her mind with the idea of suspicion. She had, as a child, been in and out of his house all day, as if it had been her own; gone to school with his children; stayed with them at their country house; driven with him in his sleigh a hundred times; made a special point, every Christmas, of discovering a gift which he would be sure to like. And now he had run off with all their money. It was the first great shock of her life, the first unmistakable indication she had ever received that all the world was not conspiring to be good to her.

And her mother was not going to be able to send her any more allowance. At a blow she saw herself reduced to the modest sum which George was giving her. If she had never had any more than George's allowance, it might not have been so bad; but the prospect of great ease in the matter of pocket-money had been dangled in front of her eyes and she had no sooner grown thoroughly accustomed to the sight of it than it was suddenly blotted out.

It is small wonder that Doll could not rise superior to this blow. She made no attempt to do so.

For a whole day she wept and wailed, bemoaning her mother's situation, raging against the perfidious Mr. Rutter, lamenting her own losses, biting her handkerchief to pieces, dabbing her red eyes, tossing and turning on the bed to which she had retired, blind with headache, and sick with sorrow for her mother, pity for herself, and

anger at the injustice of the World. Towards evening she became feverish and poor George brought in a doctor who prescribed a composing medicine, soon after taking which she fell into a sleep, chiefly of exhaustion. George, nearly beside himself, spent the night in the passage outside her door, ready to fly in to her if she should wake and call for him. But she never stirred and, towards five o'clock in the morning, George fell asleep in his chair, where he was found by the housemaid when she came down to set the house going; and a great fright she got.

He woke a little later, took a cold bath, drank some tea which he caused the girl to make for him, and, after assuring himself that Doll still slept, went for a walk on Hampstead Heath, where for an hour he strode along, whispering curses upon the name of Rutter.

When he returned he found that Doll had rung her bell and that her morning tea had just been taken to her; so he went in to see her and was overjoyed to find her greatly calmed. The sun streamed in at the window; Doll had brushed her hair, washed her face, and put on a pretty cap. This was a vast improvement on the storms of the previous day. He sat down on the side of the bed and buttered some toast for her. She put up her lips to be kissed, snuggled into his shoulder, cried ever so little; then bravely smiled at a poor little joke he hazarded and condescended to nibble his bit of toast. It was undoubtedly a great comfort to Doll to have this large, strong George about just then.

They began to talk things over. He said that he expected it was n't so bad as Mrs. Brackett had made out. Of course, she must have been dreadfully upset and bound to take a gloomy view of the situation. The next letter

they had from her would bring better news, Doll might depend upon it. Doll was quite ready to depend upon it. All she wanted was some such assurance. It is very hard, when one has always had things perfectly comfortable, to comprehend that one's situation is indeed changed adversely. The sunlight, too, was a great help to George.

It was impossible, on such a fine morning, to believe altogether in Mrs. Brackett's story. Her letter had been short and rather incoherent. It could not have told all the facts. It had evidently been written under the influence of a great and sudden disillusionment. When she came to properly look into things, George said, she would find that she had overestimated their seriousness. Not a doubt of it.

Doll achieved her breakfast; said that she would get up; got up; rejoined George in the studio; cut and arranged the flowers; was almost herself again. George, having no sitter that morning, abandoned work for the day and took his wife to Kew Gardens. Tacitly Doll's shopping was also abandoned; but they telephoned for the hired motor-car to take them to Kew. To have gone by tram would have seemed like admitting the whole truth of the disaster; and, as George reflected, the poor darling's new car would have to be given up now. But he said nothing about that. And tacitly they avoided all reference to Mrs. Brackett's letter. Until another should come from her it was useless to worry.

On the way to Kew they sent the cable to Mrs. Brackett which Doll's disorder of the previous day had caused them to forget. It read: "Your bad news received. All our love and sympathy. Feel sure things will prove less serious than you suppose. Courage."

George would dearly have liked to ask Doll the exact amount of their liabilities in respect of the new house, but he refrained. It would be time enough to go into all that when he had to. Meanwhile the thing to do was to keep Doll happy and amused. He succeeded. After all, Doll only wished to be happy and amused.

When they got home about tea-time they found, waiting, the foreman who had the building of the studio at The Lawn in his charge. He had expected Mrs. March yesterday, he said, to give him her definite instructions with regard to the arrangement of the heating pipes. He would be glad to have them as, until he did so, his work was hung up.

George thought they might as well go round to The Lawn and explain what was wanted. The pipes had been ordered and delivered and would have to be paid for, he supposed: at any rate, the studio would have to be warmed. If there had been any chance of countermanding the studio it would have been another matter; but there was no chance of it. They were in for the studio as they were in for the pipes (and the house, for that matter), and they might just as well make sure that the pipes were put in properly.

So, after tea, they went to The Lawn and spent an hour there. George moved about with an eye principally for points where economy might still be practised, but he found very few and of these he said nothing. He did n't want Doll to be alarmed again, at any rate unnecessarily. Already (optimism of the comfortable) he half believed his own assurances to Doll that Mrs. Brackett had greatly exaggerated her misfortunes.

Doll made several expensive suggestions for the im-

provement of the studio, of which the foreman hastened to take notes in his book.

That night both George and Doll slept soundly and woke to find the world a much brighter and more beautiful place. At breakfast they agreed that there was nothing to be done until they should again hear from Mrs. Brackett, except for Doll to write a letter to catch the American mail which would leave next day. This she did. It was an amplification of their cable in four sheets of note-paper; but, without more definite knowledge, anything else was impossible. It carried her on to lunch-time.

Meanwhile — the lady whose portrait was being painted having arrived — George got on with his work. He felt the importance of wasting no time at present and he welcomed the distraction from gloomy thinking.

After lunch a General was coming to be "done" in his uniform. Doll was faced with a lonely afternoon. She announced her intention of going in to London to see about some extra house-linen which they absolutely needed for The Lawn. She had that morning received the catalogue of a linen sale that was being held at some big shop or other and it would be foolish to miss this opportunity. The prices were positively absurd. She was sure she ought to go. George made no protest. He saw that the best thing for Doll, just now, was to be busy; and undoubtedly this linen was necessary. It was no use spoiling the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar. (I suppose the Demon of Extravagance was never so pleased in his life as when he invented that proverb. With what alacrity he must have set about putting it into circulation!)

So Doll telephoned for her car (George could not deny it to her; nor could he yet broach the question of the

abandonment of the new car) and went in to London. And while she was choosing her towels and sheets, she discovered the duckiest sets of doilies all laid out on a table and marked down to nothing at all. Now doilies are only a shade less necessary in a well-appointed house, if its mistress is an American, than towels; so Doll bought seven sets, because by getting seven she got each of them for fourpence less than if she had bought them separately. But her conscience made her pay for them out of her own purse and not put them down in the bill for the linen, which would now, she supposed with a sigh, come to poor darling George. And, she reflected, she could easily afford the doilies. She had heaps of money still left in the bank; it must be quite eighty pounds.

Then she tore herself away from the linen department and drove to a picture-gallery (only one shilling admission) where she looked at a rising celebrity's pictures for half an hour, not so much because she enjoyed looking at those pictures as because she felt it her duty as a painter's wife and future Queen of a Salon, to keep abreast of the times in all matters relating to the Arts. For the same reason she stopped her car at a bookseller's and bought a volume of poems by an Oriental who had recently come to the front in England and America. She had read a notice of the book only the day before in one of her newspapers, either the *Morning Post* or the *Mirror*. George's newspaper, by the way, was the *Times*, as it had always been, even in the days of his greatest thrift.

Then she went to her club, meaning to have tea there, read her book quietly, and hurry home to George; but in the hall she met an American girl, an old friend. This one was, like herself, married to an Englishman and now lived

in London. Doll was overjoyed at meeting her and she was overjoyed at meeting Doll. They had an infinity of things to say to one another, and Doll, sweet, generous fool, must needs propose tea at Rumplemeyer's, only a step away, instead of in the tea-room of the club, only half a step away. At Rumplemeyer's they did themselves proud and Doll paid. Then, because she had stayed so long, her conscience reproached her, and to make up to George for her absence she stopped at a jeweller's and bought a little pearl scarf-pin for him, which just cleaned her purse out.

Then, thoroughly satisfied with her afternoon, she returned to Hampstead.

George had n't the heart to scold her about the scarf-pin. It was such a pretty little thing and she was so entirely beautiful.

Besides, by the five o'clock post, he had received the offer of a new commission. He told her about this and they celebrated the news in half a bottle of champagne. For this was their custom.

(2)

After Mrs. Brackett's next letter Doll had a second crisis of weeping, though not at all so severe as the first, the element of shock being absent. To make up for this the news that came was much more definite and about as bad as it could be. Mrs. Brackett's new lawyer had gone very carefully into the whole question of her losses, and it was clear that she had been robbed of nearly everything. Yet she still had cause to hope that there might be enough for her to support existence upon. It was clear

also that Mrs. Brackett was facing her trouble bravely; the hysteria of the first letter was not to be found in this second one. She wrote quite calmly and logically and expressed herself as thankful that her darling Doll had already won the love of a good man and that she, Mrs. Brackett, was therefore spared the terrible anxiety which would have been hers had Doll still been dependent upon her. She, Mrs. Brackett, would manage somehow. She had her jewellery, thank Heaven! She had hoped that it would be Doll's some day, but, as things had fallen out, Doll would understand, would n't she? that it must be sold.

The villain of this tragedy had been arrested and it was expected that he would be forced to disgorge a small percentage at least of what he had stolen from so many people. He had a good deal of real estate in and around New York, it appeared. Mrs. Brackett's new lawyer did not utterly despair of her future. For herself she did n't mind so much; she was not an old woman and she had her health; but when she thought of what Doll would lose through the act of this wicked man, she was filled with unchristian hate of him. Of course the allowance must cease. George would forgive her, she knew. If only she had been allowed a little insight into business by Doll's father! But it was too late to repine now and there was no use in crying over spilt milk. It was the American way. American men tried to keep their wives right apart from the sordid business of money-getting. Their conception of woman was such a high one. And no doubt, generally speaking, it worked out for the best. But, now and then, cases arose where one could wish things had been otherwise. For one thing she could never be thankful enough;

and that was that Doll had not been with her when this happened, but had been far away, safe in the care of the good man whom she had chosen to be her life's partner. If Doll had had to share with her the misery of the past week, Mrs. Brackett declared that she, Mrs. Brackett, would have gone crazy.

When Doll had done crying and when George had done drying her poor eyes, she said, "George, I believe I want to go to mother."

"That's a good girl," said George, "and so you shall." He thought her wish a very proper one; indeed, he had been about to propose this very thing. There could no longer be any doubt about the gravity of Mrs. Brackett's position, and Doll's place was decidedly with her mother. Indeed, he felt now that she ought to have been on her way to America already and wondered why they had n't thought of this before. Then he remembered that they had honestly believed the situation exaggerated by Mrs. Brackett in her first letter. But this was not quite satisfactory, and to atone for their remissness he now seconded Doll's proposal with all his strength.

"Where's the paper?" she said. "I do hope it's the Arctic this week. Mother and I always go by her. Our cabin's A31 on the Boat Deck, I think, when we can get it. It's ever so comfortable, George. You'll love it. I do hope —"

"Doll, dear," said George, "*I can't go, you know!*"

"What?" she cried. "You don't surely expect me to cross the ocean alone?"

"Look here, Doll," he said, taking her hands, "we've got to be very sensible now, dear. Don't you see that I can't afford to go? I must stay here and paint. General

Wild's portrait is a presentation affair. It's for his seventieth or hundredth birthday or something of the kind. And I must get it done in time. Suppose I go off with you to America now. I'd be bound to disappoint a whole lot of people. I've promised that the portrait shall be ready next month. That's the worst of being a portrait-painter; one has to come up to time, like a contractor for a building. And I can't afford to offend a whole Military Club. Why, if I don't keep faith with them, it may mean the loss of who knows how many commissions. And with this great loss of your mother's and all this expense over The Lawn, we shall have to make all we can and save all we can for some time. Why, Doll, we may even have to help your mother, and God knows how gladly I'll do it; but I should n't be going the right way to work if I threw up painting for a month or so, even in order to take you over to America. So you'll be a brave girl and make up your mind to go alone, won't you?"

"You don't *want* to go," she said reproachfully, turning her shoulder to him.

"Oh, nonsense, Doll!"

"I believe you'd rather paint than look after me, any day," she went on. "Look at the way you've let me go about all this time alone."

"Silly duffer," he said and kissed her — as good an argument as another, any day.

"But it'll be hateful," she cried, "on the steamer, all by myself. And it'll look so strange. Why, we've only been married a month or two. What'll people say?"

George smiled. "But it does n't matter a hang what people will say," he said. "They'll say anything, and it's best to let 'em. We're not going to prejudice all our fu-

ture for fear of what people'll say. And look here, sweetheart, suppose I did chuck all my work just now, I'd have to give some reason for rushing over to America with you. You don't want everybody to know that your mother's lost all her money, do you, Doll?" This was not an argument which he was glad to use, but it succeeded.

"That's so," she said thoughtfully. "No, I would n't care about having that happen."

"There's another thing," he went on. "I'm afraid it won't run to a cabin on the Boat Deck of the Arctic. You see we must be very economical now; I mean *really* economical."

"Why," she said, "of course I know that. Have n't we given up the idea of your new player-piano?" This was true enough and she was properly proud of the sacrifice. She had so looked forward to giving George that new player-piano; but he had shown her quite clearly that it must not be.

Here, perhaps, was George's opportunity for telling her that she must give up her new motor-car, but, if so, he did n't take it. And after all, they were talking about her cabin on the Arctic just then, were n't they?

"I know," he said, "but we'll have to look about in all directions for places where we can save. If we do that, we'll manage all right. And I'm afraid your cabin's one of them. Those Boat Deck cabins on the big liners cost a terrible lot. Don't you think you could be pretty comfortable in something a little more reasonable?"

She sighed. "Well," she said, "I suppose if I must, I must. And the Promenade Deck has its points too." She looked so good and self-sacrificing that George had not the heart (or was it the courage?) to pursue the subject

just then; but when she had put on her things — they were going in to London together to book her passage — he succeeded in renewing the discussion, while they waited for the hired motor-car, and the end of it was that they took a very nice and not very costly cabin on one of the lower decks. Nor did Doll struggle seriously for anything better. Just then she was full of good resolutions and anxiety to save. But it would be idle to pretend that she was pleased with her accommodation. However, the ship was the Arctic. That was something.

As her reward George gave her lunch at the *Café Royal* grill-room and took her to a matinée. But it is fair to say that they sat in the dress circle and that this was Doll's suggestion.

Before going out to Hampstead they cabled to Mrs. Brackett that Doll was coming to her at once. They added a message of love and encouragement. This was George's suggestion. As he said, one must not, at such times, think of a few shillings.

Reform is a plant capable of astonishing developments.

It is the reclaimed drunkard, not your lifelong teetotaler, who takes the war-path among the saloons with an axe. The converted company promoter is more likely to give away his all to the poor than the rich young man of blameless antecedents.

This circumstance accounts for the amazing thing which happened while Doll was dressing for dinner that evening.

She had just taken from its case a simple little necklace of pearls and was about to fasten it round her throat when, all at once, she was visited by an inspiration which, it is pretty safe to say, she would never have received had

she not already made a few halting steps upon the path of self-denial. But this was a bound.

Without giving herself time to reflect, she jumped up, ran to the door, and screamed for George. When he came in she was busy sorting all her jewellery into two heaps.

"George," she cried, working away, "I've got the loveliest plan. Come and help."

"What's the game?" he asked.

"I want to divide all these things into those you've given to me and those mother's given me. Come and help. I can't breathe till it's done. Don't say a word, but sit right down and help."

He pulled up a chair, sat down, and very soon their task was accomplished. Then Doll swept to one side all the jewellery which he had given her — it was much the smaller portion — and laying her hand upon the other heap, said: "I want you to sell all this stuff for me to-morrow, and I'll take the money over to mother with me. You know she's selling hers; it was that that gave me the idea. Don't you think it'll help her some, George? Don't you think it's a good plan?"

George gave a shout of joy and clasped her in his arms. "You blessed darling," he exclaimed, "but it's a glorious plan. No one but you could have thought of it. And your mother — how proud she'll be! Help her? I should say it will and the money'll be the very least part of the help. I'll take it all in to-morrow to old Wallace," — this was a friendly jeweller of Regent Street from whom George had bought most of the jewellery that he had given to Doll, — "and I know he'll do the best he can for us. I've got no one coming to be painted to-morrow morning. We'll go in together, Doll, and we'll have lunch in town to cele-

brate this truly noble scheme. And why not sell the lot? Mine, too. I won't care so long as you save your engagement ring. And when we're rich again I'll get you lots more."

"No," said Doll, interrupting these enthusiastic observations. "No, George. I guess I won't do that. I could n't part with your gifts; but mother's are different. It'll be a kind of restitution. When she was rich she gave me everything, and now she's poor they're there to help her. And besides, I never did care very much for her taste in jewellery. It's only the little pearl necklace that I shall really miss. But I guess it's got to go in with the others. I wish she'd given me more because there would be more to give back; but she did n't believe in girls having too expensive jewellery — she always said it was n't good taste. What do you think they'll bring?"

"Well," said George, "we insured all your jewels for eight hundred, and what I've given you are n't worth more than — let me see —" He began to calculate on a bit of paper.

But Doll wanted more praise. Self-sacrifice required much praise to keep it sweet in the mouth.

"You're real pleased with me, George, are n't you?" she asked, snuggling to him again. "You think I'm being pretty good, don't you?"

George dropped his calculations and did his duty like a man. Soon Doll was happy in the conviction that she had behaved with unexampled nobleness, and the beginnings of regret were for the time stamped down and smothered.

And when this had happened the unexpected arrival was announced of Otis Gardner demanding dinner, and

the jewellery had all to be put away and George had to rush off and finish dressing.

(4)

They had not seen Otis for some time and were very glad to do it now. They were both very fond of Otis. The first thing he said was that, as he was sailing on the Arctic on Saturday, he had called to see if he could carry any messsage to Mrs. Brackett from Doll.

They had hitherto kept the news of Mrs. Brackett's reverses to themselves, waiting upon its confirmation beyond question; but they had always realised that Mrs. March and Hilda would have to be told sooner or later, and word was to have been sent that very evening to Brockenhurst, both of the catastrophe and of Doll's imminent departure for America. Otis, as one of the family, was also entitled to know what had happened and he was accordingly told. He was enormously concerned. He told them that he had himself already heard of Mr. Rutter's exploit (some small fraction of his own wealth being concerned in an enterprise with which the ingenious gentleman had been intimately connected), but he had not dreamed that Mrs. Brackett's fortunes had been involved. He said what he could, which was n't much, because there is really nothing that you can say to people who have lost all their money, which can serve the smallest useful purpose. But he expressed himself as delighted that he was going by the same ship as Doll. Since she must go without George, it was fine that there should be some one on board who could look after her a bit. George could have hugged Otis for travelling by the Arctic. It had seemed

terrible to George that Doll must cross the sea all alone.

"And, by the way," said Otis, "there'll be another friend of yours going — Crewe."

"Dick?" cried George. "You don't mean it?"

"Sir Richard?" cried Doll. "Well, if that is n't fine!"

"The very same man," cried Otis. "We fixed it up the other day when Hilda and I were over there at Beaulieu. He's coming to see us at the camp later on, when he's through with the Maine lakes."

"But the fellow's only just back from God knows where in Africa," said George. "What's got into him? Can't he sit quiet for a week or two?"

"I expect," said Otis, "it's a bad thing to break a good habit. He sat quiet a long time, did n't he, before he went to Africa? Now he's back, he finds he's lost the trick of it. I expect Beaulieu just stifles him now and, with the spring coming over all those woods, he finds he's got to get a move on himself or die right there."

"He was here one afternoon — only a little time ago," said George, "and he said nothing about going away again."

"I guess he was sickening for it," said Otis. "When I suggested, just as a joke, that he should come with me he jumped at it. When was he here?"

George reflected; consulted Doll; ultimately they arrived at the date. "Why," said Otis, "that was —" He paused with his eyes on Doll — then, deliberately, he choked on a crumb. It took much thumping on the back, and a full glass of water before the poor fellow was restored to speech; and by that time both Doll and George had forgotten that he had not finished his sentence.

"Well, George," said Doll, "I hope you think I'm

going to be properly looked after on the ocean. I should guess a future brother-in-law and your best friend ought to be able to chaperon me pretty satisfactorily."

"It's great luck," said George.

"It is," she said. "Otis is a dear old thing, of course, — are n't you, Otis?"

"Of course," said Otis.

"But," she went on, "he's terribly respectable — are n't you, Otis?"

"Terribly," said Otis.

"A week of unadulterated Otis would be the death of me," she said, "though I'd like to feel he was around in case the ship began to sink."

"Oh, I'll be around," said Otis, and he meant more than the others knew. He had been considerably impressed by the discovery that Crewe must have come to the railway carriage direct from his visit to Doll and George.

"But," Doll continued as she got up, the dinner-gong having just sounded, "Dick Crewe's *ever* so amusing. I shall get him to shoot every one of his lions over again for me, and I won't know a dull moment all the way across. Except, of course, when I'm being taken for my health-prowl round the deck by brother Otis, bless him!" She patted Otis affectionately on the head as she went past him through the door which he held for her.

Otis Gardner drove thoughtfully away from the Hampstead house and before he went to bed wrote a letter to Dick about the fishing-tackle which might be usefully taken to America, supplementary to one which he had written to him that morning. He added the following as a postscript:—

By the way, I was up with George March and his wife this evening and you'll be pleased to hear that she's to be on the Arctic. She's making a trip over to see her mother in New York. George is too busy, painting, to go, so you and I will have to do our best to take care of Mrs. George. Till Saturday morning at Euston.

O. G.

To this letter he received no reply.

(5)

Mr. Wallace of Regent Street proved to be a not ungenerous purchaser, and the jewellery that Mrs. Brackett had given to Doll realised in his shop five hundred and forty-three pounds, ten shillings. He wrote the cheque there and then gave it to George who went and bought a credit for it on New York. This arrived at The Lawn in time for Doll to take it with her.

To avoid the rush and scramble of the boat-train they went to Liverpool on the day before the steamer was to leave and stayed the night at the Lime Street Hotel. Here it was, in the lounge after dinner, that George at last brought the new motor-car under discussion.

"I absolutely hate," he said, after a few complimentary references to the sale of the jewels, "to ask you to give it up, Doll; you're being so good and dear and generous and helpful in every way; but I do feel it would be wiser not to buy it. They'll take it off our hands all right, because they can't fill the orders they're getting just now; and I really don't see how we can afford it with all the other expenses that we've got to meet at present. So you'll give it up, won't you, Doll?"

Doll pouted adorably. At another time she might have

taken this proposal very much more seriously; but this evening she was considerably more ready to be good than usual. By selling her jewels, she had set a fatally high standard for herself and she wished to live up to it if she could. Also it is a long way to America and the Atlantic is dreadfully deep. She felt very solemn and forlorn, a strange experience for Doll. If George had only been coming too!

I say she pouted adorably, and George's heart smote him; but he succeeded in steeling it for a few seconds and by the end of that time Doll had consented; and though it immediately resumed its smiting, he had just sense enough to endure.

She said: "You're very hard on me, George, but I'm afraid you're right; and if you can give up your player-piano, I expect *I* can give up my car. But *I had* hoped it would n't be necessary."

"I should like to kiss you," said George; but as they were in a public place this was out of the question. So they went upstairs at once.

Next day George took Doll aboard early, found her cabin, got her comfortably unpacked, gave the stewardess a fat tip, booked her deck-chair, tipped her deck-steward, made sure that her table had been reserved for her, gave the flowers and fruit which he had bought for her to her table-steward, gave the man some money, and then, feeling that he had done everything humanly possible to ensure her happiness, carried her off to the Promenade Deck to watch the arrival of the passengers from London.

Presently Otis appeared upon the gangway. George was the first to see him. "There's old Otis," he cried and waved a hand.

"I don't see Dick Crewe," said Doll.

"Oh, he'll be coming in a minute," said George. "I'll go and fetch them up." He ran downstairs to greet their friends on the lower deck.

Otis appeared.

"Where's the other man?" said George.

"Can't come," said Otis. "I got a wire from him last night. Hurt his ankle."

"Bad luck!" said George. "But I suppose he's wise."

"Yes," said Otis cheerfully. "I guess that's just what he is. Where's Doll?"

They went upstairs.

"Where's Sir Richard?" asked Doll.

Otis explained.

"Well," said Doll, "if that is n't too bad!"

CHAPTER VII

(1)

SIX weeks now dragged wearily over the head of the lonely George. He missed Doll acutely. The house seemed empty and dead and all the zest of existence was gone. Mercifully he had his work and the alterations at The Lawn to occupy him and so, with these matters, many hours of each day were filled; but it was a miserable period of his life.

Nevertheless, had he not been making plenty of money, it would have been much worse, and we need not waste too much pity on him. Moreover, the novel rage for economy which he was experiencing had free play, now that Doll was elsewhere.

Saving is a bad habit which most people are careful of permitting to get a hold of them; though not always because they realise its peculiarly detestable nature. There is no vice which is more ferocious in enlarging its claims, once its dominance has been admitted. George's thrift was not of the worst kind, because it was altruistic, and when one is saving for somebody else one finds it possible to be a little compassionate towards oneself, which your true miser cannot be. So George, who saved that Doll might the sooner have a motor-car, restrained his thrift within reasonable bounds. I mean, he continued to buy his meat from the butcher and did not embark upon a commerce with the cat's-meat man; and while he was vigilant in the matter of burning electricity,

he did not resort to farthing dips. But, largely to occupy some of his solitary evening hours, he assumed the direction of his household, and went carefully through the weekly books, instead of leaving everything to his cook. This caused him to make several important discoveries which in their turn led him to abandon at least two tradesmen. He had even serious thoughts of discharging the cook, but quailed at the prospect of finding another and contented himself with the exercise of a redoubled vigilance.

This experience opened his eyes to the fact that Doll had not been quite such a miracle of housewifely method as he had supposed, and he resolved that, on her return, he must have a serious consultation with her.

For a few days he tried the personal-marketing, cash-payment method as an alternative to the book system, so full of dangers; but it interfered with his work to have to descend among the shops each morning and, he suspected, detracted from his dignity in the eyes of his servants, and he relapsed, almost at once, into easier ways, cutting down his menus from three to two courses, letting his hair grow for a fortnight longer than usual, denying himself a new necktie, and stopping his evening newspaper.

He also made a valorous attempt to reduce his consumption of tobacco, but this failed because he soon persuaded himself that it was damaging the quality of his work. Still, it is worthy of being recorded.

I need not, I think, amplify this melancholy picture of a grass-widower inconsolable.

Only two events of importance broke the monotony of the poor man's existence. One was the marriage of his

sister, which took place early in June; the other was the funeral of Lady Crewe, ten days later.

Of Hilda's wedding nothing much can usefully be said. Like all weddings it was a great success and made remarkable by the charm and presence of mind which characterised the bride. The gifts were no more dreadful than the gifts at other weddings. The day was fine, but provided the small shower which ensures the future happiness of the principals (without seriously compromising the comfort of the guests), just as Otis and Hilda drove away in their car for Southampton and America and the Adirondack camp. Let us join in the cheering and look forward to seeing them on their return in October.

Lady Crewe's death was very sudden, a fitting reward of her long, sad, and beautiful life. One evening she seemed in her usual frail health; next morning the maid, coming in with breakfast, discovered that her mistress would breakfast no more. A weakened heart had ceased to beat; a sweet woman had ceased to live. It only remained to make what are called "the necessary arrangements."

Here is another matter which need not detain us. A British funeral can have no attraction for right-thinking people, though, to be sure, it is often a more respectable affair than a British wedding. But there is an element of cheerfulness about a wedding which the business of getting a poor dead body under ground lacks altogether. This is my excuse for having devoted even so much space as I have done to Hilda's great day. Let it serve me for saying still less about Lady Crewe's greater one.

George went down to the funeral and there met Dick,

brought home by telegram from the Orkneys, where he had taken his trout-rod instead of to Maine. The young men exchanged but two or three words, and parted on a promise from Dick to come soon to see his friend at Hampstead. Dick, that day, would have promised anybody anything. To all his troubles remorse had been added, remorse for having been away from his mother when she died. No doubt it was very foolish of him to blame himself; but when we are thoroughly wretched we often welcome any additional reasons for grief. They act as, I understand, the doctor's counter-irritants do, drawing the pain away to a new place where it may be more bearable. But no counter-irritant, whether medical or spiritual, predisposes a man to conversation; particularly with one who is the cause of a principal pain.

Dick had not the slightest intention of going to see George at Hampstead.

Beaulieu was now doubly impossible to him, and he fled, the moment he could get away, and was no more seen in England till the autumn. Where he went does not matter; it is enough if I observe that he avoided America.

Nobody can say that Dick did not make a good fight.

(2)

Doll came home to George in the middle of June and brought her mother with her.

Mrs. Brackett's affairs were practically all in order again (though this involved a most painful reduction in her income), and there was nothing to keep her, so her new lawyer said, in America.

George and Doll were to move into The Lawn at the end of June.

So her coming to England at this time not only gave Mrs. Brackett a change, of which she stood in some need, but it enabled her to help Doll in the removal, as they had always intended she should do. On the whole, George was inclined to think this a wise thing which Doll had done. His natural kindness of heart made him do his best to be glad to have Mrs. Brackett staying with them. It would be decidedly good for her to have something to busy herself with for a little time; it would keep her from brooding on her injuries, he thought.

To do her justice, Mrs. Brackett's anger against her misfortunes, though it was hot, was not a selfish one. The unspeakable Rutter had robbed her shamelessly; but, in robbing her, he had robbed Doll, and it was this that made his wickedness so peculiarly shocking. For herself, she had a bare sufficiency left,—it might be called two hundred pounds a year,—and with this she could, she believed, struggle along without feeling actual want; she had always understood that such an income could be made to meet the ultimate necessities of a single woman. But where were now all her fine plans for promoting the happiness of her child? For nothing on earth would she have consented to Doll's marrying a painter had she not expected to be able to supplement the allowance which Doll would receive. George had been a luxury which this mother had thought herself able to afford to her girl; and now he appeared to her to be a millstone which she had tied round Doll's neck. Successful though he was in his own small way, he could not for many years, if ever, hope by his own exertions to give Doll

the life of ease and profusion to which her mother thought her absolutely entitled; but with the Brackett fortune at Doll's disposal this had been a matter of small importance. Wealth, as America understands it, had never been considered by Mrs. Brackett as essential in a son-in-law, and, so long as she could give Doll all the money she needed, Mrs. Brackett was prepared to allow her child to follow the desires of her heart.

Mrs. Brackett, then, came to England filled with bitterness against two very different men, Rutter and George. Rutter had deprived her of her right to make up for George's inevitable shortcomings; George, in her distorted view of the matter, had tricked Doll into a wretched and unescapable situation. There is no one so unjust as a doting mother. If George had not thrust himself in, — so Mrs. Brackett might no doubt have argued, — Doll would by now have married some really substantial man of her own race, able and willing to humour her lightest or most costly wishes; or, at least, she would still be free to choose among numerous desirables. But George and Rutter between them had brought her down to something not very far removed, in Mrs. Brackett's eyes, from poverty; and, by so doing, they had done her, Mrs. Brackett, the deadliest injury that it was possible for her to conceive. That George was innocent and Rutter guilty made small difference to the sore-hearted little woman; yet had she sufficient reason left in her to keep her aversion from George to herself. Nothing, at present, could be gained by any open display of her hostility toward George, either to George himself or to Doll in private. For the present Doll's whole happiness depended on this man, and the only sensible course

to pursue was to keep friendly with him and see that he made as much money as possible. So long as she had been able to provide, Mrs. Brackett had been content that George should paint a moderate number of portraits each year and spend the rest of his time in amusing Doll; but now he must be made to realise what a man's business in life really was.

In a word, Mrs. Brackett, being herself no longer able to pay for Doll's extravagances, proposed to do it vicariously, and was prepared to put the whole force of her active personality into the business.

And George, poor devil, tried hard to be pleased when he learned that Doll was bringing her mother to England.

(3)

The campaign was opened in the studio, after dinner, on the evening of these ladies' arrival at Hampstead.

"Well, George," said Mrs. Brackett as soon as the maid who had brought their coffee had retired, "it's just too wonderful to be here at last under the roof of my little Doll and her English husband. After the terrible times of the last month or two it seems impossible for me ever to be happy again; but dear me! when I look around this cosy den of yours and see my Doll in that big chair, just as lovely and sweet as ever, and you over there, so solid and safe-looking, and know that I'm right here in this chair with the two of you, why! I simply can't believe that anything can ever harm me again. But it does make me miserable to think of all the expenses in your new house that I —"

"But don't think of them," said George. "That's what I want you to do, mommer."

With rather mistaken humour he had, after his marriage, chosen this name for her, and, though she had never encouraged him, he had persisted. This was one of the things which Mrs. Brackett resented in George. It was hard to have trained up her child to look upon 'mother' as the only possible thing among people of refinement and then to be called 'mommer' by her son-in-law; it was very hard. And Doll abetted George in his wrong-doing. Sometimes even she used the word herself. But of course with Doll it was just her fun, whereas Mrs. Brackett suspected George of a willingness to irritate her. In this she did him an injustice. He really thought that she liked it. 'Mommer' seemed to George such a jolly, comical little name.

"Yes, George," she said, "I know that's what you *want* me to do, but how can I help it? If it had n't been for me, Doll would surely have taken a less expensive house and you would n't now —"

"Oh," he interrupted her again, "never mind about what's done. You've nothing to blame yourself about whatever. We shall manage all right. I've got plenty of work to do and lots coming on, and if we're a little careful for a year or two we shall do splendidly. And there's another thing. From a business point of view The Lawn is a good move. If people who come to be painted find us living in a big house like that, they won't be surprised if I ask a high price." This was a feature of his situation on which George, naturally enough, liked to dwell and he hoped it would be a comfort to Mrs. Brackett also. He was anxious to make Mrs. Brackett as happy as possible, for he was very sorry for her.

"Yes, George," she said, "I know, I know. But it's not fair that you should have all these expenses thrown on you like this. I had truly meant to do my share in making our dear Doll happy, and it's almost more than I can bear to realise that all that is now out of my power. If you were any other man I could n't bear it at all. But, knowing you as I do, I'm sure that *you'll* do everything you can to remedy *my* deficiencies. You're my only hope now, for if Doll is n't happy, what happiness do you think there can be in life for me? It makes me very glad to hear that you're so busy and that you're going to put up your prices. That's the finest news, is n't it, Doll?"

"Oh," said Doll, "I'm not worrying, mother. George is n't worrying. You'd better not worry."

Mrs. Brackett smiled and sighed and dried a tear. "Ah, lamb," she said, "don't ask *your* mother not to worry about her little girl. It's a bad habit, perhaps, but it's an old one; just as old as you, Doll. Just as old as you. I don't think I'm likely to break myself of it now, do you, George?"

"I hope not," said George politely, though not quite truthfully.

"Well," said Mrs. Brackett, "I think you've acquired it too and you know its force. You know how impossible it is to break oneself of, don't you?"

"Rather," said George, with a laugh that was not altogether merry. He wished that she would take his devotion a little more for granted.

"George," Mrs. Brackett exclaimed, suddenly, clasping her hands, "I've given Doll into your keeping. I've renounced my *right* to look after her. And now I've no

longer even the privilege of doing a few little occasional things to make her happy. It's all up to you, George, now. But if you realise it, why! I believe I'll be almost thankful that that man robbed me. For you'll forgive my saying that you're not an American."

"Certainly," said George a little stiffly.

"Ah!" she cried, "you don't understand what I mean, and it's so difficult to explain, especially to such a dear, generous fellow as you are. But you don't—you can't—know how our American men worship their women-folks. An Englishman is brought up with a different idea about women. He can't help it and I don't say that it's a wrong idea. But, George, you'll try to remember that Doll *was n't* brought up in the English atmosphere. And that's why I say that, if my troubles cause you to acquire the American point of view, I shall bless Heaven for them. A woman should look to her husband for *everything*, George, and that's what I want Doll to do. Not to me. To you. For everything, George. That way her best happiness lies."

"Oh, mother," said Doll, "do let the poor old thing alone. He's going to be good to me, all right."

Mrs. Brackett rose. "Why," she said with a resolute brightness, "I believe I'll leave you *both* alone. You'll have plenty to say to each other this first evening and I'm *not* going to be in the way while I'm here."

"Oh, skittles!" cried George. "Sit down, mommer."

"No," she said. "No, George. Let me begin as I mean to go on. And, truly, I have some mail to attend to; and I want to get my things out of my trunks. So I'll just tell you good-night and run up to my room right now. When I resigned, I resigned properly."

Doll sighed and got up slowly from the large chair in which she was so comfortable.

"I'll come and help you unpack," she said. She realised that her mother was her guest.

Mrs. Brackett was unable to think of Doll as of anything but her child. Of the maternal instinct and the filial there is no question which is the stronger.

"You sit right down, my lamb," she said. "You're tired after your journey and you're not to move, least of all for me. I'm not going to have you stooping over trunks."

"I'll send Clara to help," said Doll, approaching the bell.

"You will not," cried Mrs. Brackett gaily. "I've got to learn to do these things for *myself* now. If I can't afford to take a maid around with me any longer, I won't have other people's maids. I hope I'm not too old to unpack for myself, Doll. I expect it'll be very good for me, too. Poor folks should try to be healthy. If I'm going to visit here, it's got to be understood that I'm not to be a trouble in the house. I'm no longer first with my Doll and I can't hope to be. So sit down again right there where you were before, my child, and when you've had all your talk out with your husband, come in and hug me good-night before you go to bed. But just let me alone to manage for myself till then."

She kissed the tips of her fingers to them and darted through the door.

Doll sighed again, this time with contentment, and sank back into her chair. "Poor mother," she said, "she's being ever so brave and good." The habit of obedience — where obedience has always resulted in in-

creased and not diminished comfort — may not readily be broken.

George filled his pipe and wondered if this was a good moment for bringing forward certain proposals, for the future regulation of disbursements, which he had prepared against Doll's return; but he decided that she was too lovely and, no doubt, too tired to be worried with his pestilent economies till the morrow.

He began to tell her of two commissions which he had accepted since his last letter to her had been written. He felt the need of a little encouragement himself.

CHAPTER VIII

(1)

THE great and desperate business of removal now began. 'The men' appeared, early one morning, and, from that moment till a week had passed, life was a misery to George March. He would have done much better to pack a wallet and disappear upon a walking-tour; but that mistaken sense of loyalty which prompts most men, at such times, to stand by their able, clear-headed women forced him to lend his embarrassing presence to the operations. He was always in the way when he was to be found, and never to be found when he was wanted. When all was going well he made absurd suggestions subversive of policies previously determined, and in crises his brains took wing. He had happy ideas upon which he acted independently of Authority, to the wastage of time, muscular effort, and, in consequence, money. He was still asleep when it was necessary that his bed should be taken away. He forgot that lunch was an hour earlier than usual, and he presented himself for dinner at half-past seven, when he ought to have known perfectly well that it could not possibly be served before nine. With his own hands he hung in the dining-room those pictures which Doll desired in her boudoir, and he spent a long time over establishing a particularly heavy bookcase in a corner of the drawing-room which Doll had destined to receive her writing-desk. Any removal presents a thousand such opportunities for mis-

chief to a well-intentioned incompetent, and George must have availed himself of at least nine hundred and ninety-nine before he was finally driven out and told to spend his days at his club until further notice. It is unnecessary to dwell on the innumerable small frictions which enlivened this period; it is enough to say that while they made George no happier, they did, by their cumulative effect, make it easier for Doll and her mother ultimately to get rid of him.

As for these two ladies they bore themselves with all the courage, patience, and resourcefulness which a complete and detailed victory over British workmen represents. They got things as they wanted them and not otherwise. George, their opponents' chief ally and excuse, once out of the way, they established and maintained an ascendancy as perfect as it was amazing to the horny-handed foe. Bribery, cajolery, raillery, menace, every weapon was brought to bear in turn, and in each case with unfailing appreciation of its peculiar suitability. Doll's eyes were a great asset and the enemy went down in heaps before them; where they did not promise success, Mrs. Brackett's tongue opened fire. The afternoon teas which they instituted did wonders, and each evening's distribution of cigarette-packets bore golden fruit on the following day.

When the storm had passed, The Lawn was found to be furnished exactly as had been intended, a circumstance upon which America is to be congratulated.

George, no doubt feeling this, took the exhausted conquerors out to dinner at The Carlton and afterwards to a theatre. Then he would have taken them home, but Doll thought it would amuse her mother to go to supper

at the Savoy, and George was not man enough to dispute it.

But next day he knew that the time had come for the serious talk with Doll which was so necessary if their future was to be bright and not dark. Accordingly, Mrs. Brackett having established herself in the drawing-room with her fountain-pen and a large supply of Doll's newly stamped and very expensive note-paper, he drew his wife into the new studio, seated her in the great new armchair, and pulling up a stool beside her, spread out before her lovely eyes a sheet of foolscap covered with formidable-looking figures. Though he had spent his time recently at his club, George, too, had not been idle.

Doll pouted in her most adorable fashion; but George, knowing that danger, kept his eyes resolutely on his paper. Doll, having failed with one weapon, tried another. She made her voice very soft. She said, "Oh, George! You're not going to be horrid this very first day in our new home."

"Yes," said George, "I am going to be detestable."

"I know what all those figures mean," she sighed. "More horrid economies."

"Yes," said George. "We've got to do it, Doll, and there's no use our kicking. Now, just look here. This column shows what I'm in for, as far as I can tell at present. This one shows my probable income during the next two years, from my investments and from my painting, if I do as well as I can reasonably expect. Now, do you see how much leeway I've got to make up? There!" he put his pencil against the figure. "It's a good deal, is n't it?" he asked.

She stared uncomprehendingly at the paper. "I don't know," she said, and her voice was a little sulky. "How should I? I've never understood money matters, George. I thought that was to be *your* business."

"No," he said patiently, but his heart sank. "*Our* business, Doll."

"I think money such a trouble," she said. "I hate all that kind of thing. It's so sordid."

"Yes," he said, "I dare say it is. But that can't be helped. We've *got* to be sordid sometimes. If it comes to that, it's sordid of me to ask any money at all for a portrait. Of course, if life was just a pleasant dream, I could give all my pictures away; but how would my Doll get along then? What about the butcher and baker, to say nothing of the dressmaker?"

"George," she cried, "that reminds me. I've got a splendid economy for us. There's a fur sale at Debenhams and they've some ermine coats that are marked down to nothing at all. Let me get the catalogue."

He pressed her back in her chair. "Little idiot," he said. "Be sensible, can't you?" He tried to make his voice affectionate and humorous, but there crept in a small tang of irritation which Doll's acute ear at once marked.

"Well," she said in a voice that was neither affectionate nor humorous, "I suppose I may as well hear what you suggest."

He patted her hand in the vain hope of getting her to smile at him. "That's right," he said and began hurriedly to develop his plans.

"So you see," he concluded, "there's nothing to be alarmed about. We only have to exercise a little care in

certain directions; deny ourselves a few luxuries that we can do without perfectly. We'll give up dining in town quite so often as we have done and not go to absolutely everything new at the theatres; stay here this summer and next instead of travelling abroad as we had intended; entertain only a few people that we really like —”

“But,” she said, “what's the good of my having all this new house and a big new dining-table and whole stacks of new linen and silver if nobody's to see them? Besides, it'll be good for *you* if we entertain. A portrait-painter must know people. You've told me so yourself, often.”

“Oh,” he said, “we can entertain, of course, to some extent. We don't need to live like hermits. We can go to the theatre now and then and dine sometimes in London, of course. Don't think I want my little girl to have no fun at all. But don't you think it's more sensible to live quietly and save, where we can, for a year or so, than for me to raise the money now by selling out investments which bring in good interest at a time when everything's down far below what I gave for it? That would be rather a costly way of meeting our difficulties,” he ended with a laugh.

To George, an artist, who had made with his own labour the money which a large part of his investments represented, his capital was something peculiarly precious. He knew that only it and the skill of his hands stood between him and Doll and poverty; and to propose to part now with a great piece of it (and at a loss) rather than live quietly for a year or two seemed to him sheer madness. Artists are peculiarly at the mercy of

chance. An evening's chill may destroy a voice worth hundreds of thousands of pounds, and the number of accidents which may result in making a cunning hand forever useless is limited only by one's imagination. George knew this as well as another, and every hundred pounds that he had invested had, by so much, relieved his mind of a burden of which it was never wholly free. And if this had been the case before his marriage, how much the more was it so now that he was responsible for the welfare of Doll? So, when he used the folly of realising his investments as an argument in favour of an alternative plan, he did it almost as a joke.

Doll saw nothing funny in the suggestion.

"Well," she said, brightening up, "I don't know. I'd no idea you could get all the money at once. I thought we could only get it by saving. But, of course, if it's possible to have it now and pay everything off and be done with all this trouble, I should think that would be much the best thing to do. Yes, it seems to me to sell some of your investments would be a very good plan."

"Doll," he said, "you don't understand."

"No," she replied, "I don't, George. It seems to me very queer that you should expect me to be uncomfortable for two years, just so that you may hold on to your old investments. It looks a little selfish to me."

Not without excuse he made a very small despairing movement.

"But, my dear child," he cried, "don't you know that my investments, as you call them, are *your* investments every bit as much?"

"Then," she said, "I vote for selling some of them."

"It is n't sensible, Doll," he cried. "It's foolish. It

would be wrong. Suppose I were to get a poisoned hand and have to lose it. Such a thing might happen at any time. Suppose I could n't paint any more. Don't you see that our capital would be all that we'd have? I would n't dare to sell."

"Then," she said, "why not borrow it?"

"But, Doll," he protested, "I'd have to pay it off just the same in a year or two; we'd still have to economise; and I'd have to pay interest as well."

"Would n't your mother lend it to you?" she said. "Your mother would n't want any interest, of course."

He threw up his hands, literally not metaphorically, and burst into a laugh partly of genuine amusement, partly of vexation. "Oh, Doll," he said, "what a child you are! Is my mother to go short that we may dine in town?"

"Well," she said, "*she* does n't want to dine in town. She's old."

George jumped to his feet. "I must go for a walk," he said. "I shall get angry if we go on with this now."

"Take your waterproof, George," she said. "It looks as if it might rain any minute." She spoke mildly, but her face was hard.

He left her abruptly, defeated for that time.

(2)

George March was an easy-going fellow who asked nothing of Life but that it should let him alone. His personal ambition was not exorbitant. If he could put the best of himself into a reasonable number of pictures before he died he would be content. He wished to be,

each year, a better painter than the year before it; but Immortality he neither expected nor craved. He knew pretty well what he was worth as a painter and was satisfied if he achieved so much; to achieve less he had no mind at all. He had few principles; but those he had were strong, indeed, unshakable. To do poor work for money was, in his eyes, to sell oneself to the Devil.

So far, Life had used him very kindly or, shall I say? had not devoted any of its attention to him. In the days when struggling was good for him he had had just enough money to enable him to study under excellent masters and preserve his health; success came, not too soon; thereafter he lived in great comfort and without anxiety. Self-development was possible and he did not fail to seize his advantage.

Having, then, everything, he only desired that he should be allowed to keep it; in other words, that Life would let him alone.

It is not Life's business to let people alone and she is very attentive to business. George's wish was a foolish one, though it arose from a sound appreciation of his luck.

Yet when he married Doll he was perfectly certain that until he met her he had been blind; whereas it was she that blinded him. Having married her, he added to his simple ambitions the ambition of making his wife happy. He thought it just as simple as the others. I do not know that he is to be blamed very much for this.

Doll, as he then knew her, was a very happy creature. Her demands from Life were more exacting than George's, but she found them even easier to satisfy. All she wanted was — everything of the best. She had been brought up

to regard the scale on which many of her fellow-citizens lived as something very vulgar. Newport villas and gold-plated steam-yachts did not appeal to her at all. To outdo other millionairesses in extravagance, to achieve a newspaper reputation as a Queen of a fantastic Society, to wear gowns made of humming-birds and to own an Atlantic cable of pearls — such eccentricities of wealth she was prepared to leave to others, less nicely educated. But within the limits which good taste prescribed she felt herself entitled to everything rich and rare. And until her mother met with misfortune she had never had to ask for anything in vain. George saw in her, when he married her, a quite contented girl. If he made the mistake of supposing that her contentment was fundamental and that her environment was not responsible for it, he only did what ninety-nine men in a hundred would have done upon whom Doll's eyes should have beamed love.

Life, having bound these two people firmly together, lost no time, as we have seen, in setting to work seriously upon them. Hitherto she had overlooked them, and she felt that her self-respect demanded of her the exercise of some rather particular attention towards them.

It was the easiest thing in the world to cause Mr. Rutter to play the fool. In Life's box of tricks there are few more useful than the Unscrupulous Solicitor. He is far better than the Overworked Signalman or the Well-meaning Friend, though there are many kinds of Politician with which he cannot for a moment be compared. But let us not be carried away along this attractive path. It is enough to observe that Mr. Rutter served his turn uncommonly well. Once he had been played, Life was

able almost to retire from the game, leaving the rest confidently in the hands of her allied opponents.

George, then, was at last awake to the fact that he was no longer being let alone. The easy course of his affairs was interrupted, he could not even guess how seriously or how lightly. At last the true significance of Mrs. Brackett's losses was beginning to become dimly apparent to him. At last he understood that Mrs. Brackett might not be the only person to be pitied. At last he realised that Doll's happiness could be affected by her environment; that it was not fundamental.

Here was Life concerning herself with him at last, and what was to be done now? How was he to bear himself to meet this threat?

The crisis had come suddenly upon him; but he was wakened up quite sufficiently to see that in its issue was all his future happiness or misery.

Was he to give way, or was he to persist? With a word he could bring back the smiles to Doll's sweet lips. Yet, with that same word, what a surrender of his self-respect would be made! To sell his stocks would be foolish and wrong, of that he was absolutely convinced; yet to refuse was to risk — what? His heart grew cold as there sounded in his ears once again, "Take your waterproof, George. It looks as if it might rain any minute." He had never before heard that note in her voice. Hard, hard, hard, by God! Hard as flint. The horror of it seemed doubled by the apparent solicitude of the words, "Take your waterproof" — the tender wife; and the — the voice of an enemy.

And to make her his friend he must do what he knew to be wicked folly.

And for the sake of a few restaurant dinners she would allow this. Allow it? She would insist upon it.

What kind of love was this?

Thus George to his soul as he moved agitatedly over the surface of Hampstead Heath.

Sooner or later he must return to The Lawn; sooner or later he must meet Doll again; sooner or later the discussion must be resumed.

How would it go? What was he to say to her? How was he to convince her of the justice of his case? That it was a just one he had no doubt at all. To risk all their future for the sake of a few extra luxuries would be to do a wicked thing. He had no confidence any longer in Life. Should he sell his securities, he felt certain that the next day he would, in some fashion or other, lose the use of his right hand. Indeed, it almost appeared to him, so shaken was his belief in his luck, that the only way of retaining the use of his right hand was to retain his securities intact. That new note in Doll's voice had for the moment destroyed his common sense. It is, I suppose, a mistake to live too comfortably. Had George been better acquainted with adversity, he would have learned to stand up to it with greater resolution; but now its first whisper sounded in his ears like the roaring of the avalanche.

He walked far and fast, up hill and down; his feet followed paths often trod before; he hardly knew where he went. Young children ran scared from before him; nursemaids gazed curiously after him; loving couples exchanged *facetiae* at his expense. Heath-keepers stared at him as he passed them, muttering; the fools who flew kites on Parliament Hill brought their eyes to earth; at

the Highgate Ponds the imbeciles who swam their boats and their dogs nudged one another and grinned; the idlers of the Broad Walk were temporarily enlivened by his appearance; the water-colour sketchers of the West Heath suspended, for a season, their mild futilities.

In the gardens of Golder's Hill he came to himself with his face close to some wire netting beyond which certain kangaroos were hopping, ludicrously enough.

"Good God!" he said aloud. "What am I doing here?"

A learned-looking man who stood close by him trying, by light chuck and hissing, to attract the attention of the kangaroos to some groundsel which he had passed through the wire, started, gazed at George for a second, and then moved rapidly away, calling upon two lads in sailor suits.

George gave a harsh little laugh and set off in the opposite direction. He was going home, not because he greatly wished to do so, but because he was very hungry and happened to have no money on him. Life neglects no trifles.

As he let himself into his house he said to himself; "After lunch we must have this thing out properly. Yes, to temporise will be fatal, quite fatal."

The parlour-maid met him with the news that Mrs. March and Mrs. Brackett had gone in to London to do some shopping. They would be lunching at Pagani's about half-past one, Mrs. March had said, in case Mr. March should get back from his walk in time to join them.

George looked at his watch. It was ten minutes past one. "No, Nellie," he said. "I'd hardly have time. Bring me something to eat in the studio. A sandwich. Anything."

His appetite was gone.

(3)

Doll, after George left her, sat for some time staring in front of her. She, too, was wondering what she should do.

The hostility declared by the hard little voice in which she had recommended George to take his waterproof was not yet deep-seated. She was very fond of George, and it was not an easy matter for her to be in antagonism to him. If she had thought that he was serious in his objection to selling out, she would have been a great deal unhappier; but she could not believe this. There had been so much talk of economy and it had come to so little that she had not realised their position at all. They had abandoned the player-piano and the motor-car. That was a great deal done already — to say nothing of her sale of her jewels. Surely it was enough. As to embarking on a two years' course of regular self-denial in order to raise money that could be obtained at once simply by selling stock — such a proceeding was clearly absurd. Yet George had seemed to be very earnest over it all. He had certainly almost lost his temper. So had she. This must not happen again. When he came back she must show him that she was right. It would be quite easy. She began to map out a plan of argument, but found it not so easy as she had expected.

In every difficulty, all through her life, Doll had sought counsel of her mother. She did so now. She left the studio and went to the drawing-room. "Mother," she said, "I'd like to talk to you."

Mrs. Brackett dropped her pen and wheeled round in her chair. The maternal ear had caught the trouble in the girl's voice.

"For pity's sake, child," she cried, "don't frown like that. There's nothing ages a woman as quickly as frowning. Whatever is the matter?"

"Nothing much," said Doll, as she obediently abolished her frown. "It's only about George."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Brackett.

"He's been talking economy again and I don't understand his plan." She explained what George had proposed. "And I can't see," she concluded, "why he doesn't sell some of his stocks now and be done with all these hateful debts at once. It seems to me much the most sensible thing to do; does n't it to you, mother?"

"George," said Mrs. Brackett, "is an Englishman. He puts his money before his wife."

"No, I don't think so. He's awfully fond of me and he'd do anything to make me happy. I know it, mother. It's not that, I'm sure. But it does seem so senseless to set out to scrape and save and never have a good time for two whole years, when we might avoid it all. He seems to think it would be risky."

"An Englishman," said Mrs. Brackett, "is n't good at taking chances. He must feel secure. He'd rather feel secure than give his wife a good time. I never meant that George is n't fond of you, lamb. Of course he is. It's just his English nature to be cautious. He can't help it, poor fellow. But I'd like to see the American who'd be afraid to risk a bit of his capital if he could save his wife from having to give up her automobile."

"Well," said Doll, "that's true. He is an Englishman, and I suppose it's no use kicking about that. And he just *won't* sell his old stocks. You never saw any one look so obstinate, mother. But I suppose he's right." Now

that George was being attacked, the natural loyalty of the girl prevailed over her anger and extorted this admission from her.

"I suppose he's nothing of the sort," snapped Mrs. Brackett. "Why, I call it just stingy! To expect you to go for two years and never visit a theatre or have a new dress!"

"Oh," said Doll, laughing, "it won't be as bad as that."

"Believe me," said her mother, "a man who begins to talk economy to his wife within six months of his wedding wants watching. He may say that it won't be as bad as all that; but you wait and see. Caution in a man can easily become meanness. This is *not* the time to give in, Doll. If you do, you'll be sorry. Why, it's not *right* to let him act so. It's bad for him. I'd hate to say I think that George is naturally mean. I don't. He's careful, that's all. He has a decided streak of generosity, but he's afraid to take risks. Well, generosity's a plant that can be encouraged, and I guess George's needs a *cloche* over it for a spell."

Excitement was apt to lower the level of Mrs. Brackett's phraseology.

"Well," said Doll, "I don't see quite what *I* can do."

"Well, if you are n't getting *English*, Doll!" cried her mother. "To think that I should live to hear you say a thing like that! One would never believe that you are an American. What can you do? Why, assert yourself, my poor lamb. Show him that you don't mean to be put second to his stocks and shares. Just go right on having a good time, and when he sees that you are n't going to feed out of his hand he'll fall into line, right away. What's he afraid of if he sells some stock?"

"I think he fancies he might injure his hand and never be able to paint again. And if he breaks into his savings—"

Mrs. Brackett crowed derisively. "He might put arsenic on his pie in mistake for sugar," she said; "but it's not very probable. And money's not made to be saved and hoarded at one and a half per cent in some iron-clad Government Stock. It's made to have a good time with. And when it's gone, then's the moment to whirl in and get some more. It makes me shudder to hear of a painter of George's reputation talking about the danger of ruin. Why, his prices are going up all the time. Did n't he tell me that he would be able to charge twice or three times as much, once he got into this bigger house? Well, now he's in it. Now, let him turn to and paint portraits and plenty of them and give my girl the kind of life she's been accustomed to; not sit hugging his precious savings and wondering when the sky's going to fall and flatten him. It's not *manly* the way George thinks. I'm ashamed to have him do it, Doll, and it's not right in you to let him. This is the place where you've got to decide if you're going to be a wife or just a rug lying around to be trodden on; and if I know my girl she won't elect for being any kind of carpet. And that reminds me. Did n't you say you wanted two extra rugs in the studio, to cover that bare place, Doll?"

"Yes," said Doll slowly, "I *did*. But —"

"Let's go into Liberty's right away and order them," cried Mrs. Brackett. "I tell you, Doll . . ."

What she told her can be imagined and its result we know.

Poor little, big, beautiful, stupid Doll!

CHAPTER IX

(1)

THE history of this summer and autumn is a sad one, full of dissension. Had George been matched against Doll in single combat, it is probable that he would have prevailed easily enough, because the girl loved him as much as she could love any man, and, being a good girl, had meant and sincerely desired to be a good wife. Like his, her nature was an easy-going one; she hated disputes and loved to be surrounded, always, with affection. That an exaggerated sense of her own importance characterised her is true, but it was less a native blemish than one with which her environment had afflicted her. From the moment of her birth she had suffered under the worship of a doting mother, every one with whom she had ever come in contact had seemed her devotee, and her circumstances had never denied her any wish. It is small wonder if she had learned to believe that the Universe centred in her own beautiful person. Yet, had she been let alone, it is much more likely that she would soon have owned the reasonableness of George's case than that she would have hardened her heart, as she did, and persisted in considering herself entirely in the right.

At her elbow always was Mrs. Brackett, blind votary of the child, burning all day the heady incense of solicitude, speaking forever the dispraise of the only rival before whom the self-love of her goddess could have yielded. Scratch Doll and you laid open the heart of her mother. The smallest protest from George at which Doll, alone,

would have only pouted, assumed in Mrs. Brackett's eyes the proportions of a tyranny. His common caution was for her calculated cruelty. A refusal, however regretful, seemed to her like a blow across her girl's face.

The insane are not all in the asylums, or Mrs. Brackett would not have been at large; for there is no doubt that her mind was seriously unbalanced where Doll was concerned. Mother-love is a beautiful thing, and, kept within proper bounds, can only be placed among the highest glories which enoble humanity; but the same may be said of ambition, to which we owe almost everything. Yet that ambition can urge a man into great crimes no one will deny, and when it does so, we have no hesitation in pronouncing its victim mad; yes, though his genius manifest itself in a hundred other directions. And when a mother deliberately sets to work to destroy the love of her child for the man that that child has chosen, let it be sheer evil jealousy that moves her or tenderness for the beloved object, or both, — when a mother, I say, does this, then is she mad, indeed, and worthy, if not of restraint in a padded cell, at least of banishment to some place where her activities may be exercised in a less dangerous fashion.

Mrs. Brackett, then, to be plain, did, during this period, everything she could to rouse the anger of Doll against George, encouraged her in every possible way to embarrass him in his finances, and left no stone unturned to substitute for Doll's idea of him the picture of a grudging, trampling, surly brute, careless alike of his wife's affection, health, and enjoyments. And all for the welfare of the child; and all in the name of mother-love.

I say that this is madness.

(2)

We have now reached a hateful part of the story upon which nobody can wish more time to be spent than may be strictly necessary. The preparation of a catastrophe proceeds by small steps, each of which in itself seems unworthy of serious notice. A tiff is nothing — how could it be with such a name? — but twenty tiffs often do more than one honest quarrel. That diligent reptile, Discord, advancing insidiously on its belly, is a spectacle from which to avert the eyes; its barely perceptible, wriggling movements are so ugly. Little failures, little resolutions, little disappointments, little hopes, little complaints, little explanations, little harshnesses, little bitternesses, little angers, little spites, little outbursts, little reconciliations — little things all; why should I chronicle such small and nasty beer? Tragedy when it arrives (the ground having been made all smooth) is by comparison a delectable sight. Passion, let loose at last, deals, at any rate, in matter of moment. Any one would rather see a fight with knives than a mischief-maker whispering in an ear. Life and death, love and hate, when these are to the fore who would turn to see a grocer sanding his sugar? No one, I swear, but a rival grocer, himself a sugar-sander.

Let us content ourselves with one or two incidents which shall, I hope, sufficiently illustrate a sorry state of affairs.

(a)

The wall-paper in Doll's bedroom was white with a chintz pattern in which pale green was the predominant

colour. Doll had been particularly pleased with this wall-paper.

Mrs. Brackett, brushing Doll's hair one night, said: "I'm just a little sorry, lamb, you chose pale green for this wall-paper of yours. Don't you think pale blue would have been more suitable to your age and more becoming, too, with your colouring?"

Doll yawned. "I dare say," she said. "But I liked it."

"It's so important," Mrs. Brackett went on, "for a woman to have her bedroom just right. It's so intimately hers. It's almost a part of her. I do wish you'd had blue."

"Well," said Doll, "it's too late now. The paper's on the wall, you see."

"Oh, I know it's too late," said her mother; "but not because the paper's on the wall, Doll." Her eyes glittered and she brushed Doll's hair violently.

"No?" said Doll. She was quite satisfied with the paper.

"No," said Mrs. Brackett. "No, my poor darling."

Doll perceived that her mother alluded to George. "Oh," she said, "you mean George would n't care about changing it now. Well, I would n't like to ask him, I own. Poor George. I wonder what he'd say. I suppose he'd tell me not to be a little fool." She laughed rather bitterly.

"Oh," said Mrs. Brackett, "George may always be trusted to refuse courteously, of course."

Doll's eyes filled with tears, but she said nothing.

Mrs. Brackett threw down the brush and folded her child in her arms. "My poor darling," she murmured. "My poor lovely Doll."

Doll cried a little on her mother's shoulder, but still said nothing.

"It makes me cross," cried Mrs. Brackett. "Of course I know that you can get along with a green wall-paper. It's not going to injure your health. But what I ask is, why *should* you? It is n't as if George was n't making plenty of money. If he was a poor man, I'd be the last to do anything to worry him. But he is n't poor. He's making money all the time. Yet rather than take a paltry risk that no American would consider for a moment, he'll let you go without all those little things that a woman needs to complete her. This wall-paper's just one of them. That ermine coat that he would n't let you buy is another. Does he ever so much as bring you home a box of chocolates?"

"He buys me flowers pretty often," said Doll.

"Occasionally," Mrs. Brackett admitted, "he buys you a few flowers. Yes. And if he realised one tenth of your preciousness, he'd cover you with them every day. This house would be like a florist's shop. Oh! if I'd only not lost my money!"

This was the chief burden of her song and with some such cry she always wound up these discussions. If she had only not lost her money! She seemed to think that if she had retained possession of her fortune, she would have been able to make up to Doll for George's miserly treatment. She forgot that, in that case, George would not have been obliged to be, and would not have been, miserly.

When Mrs. Brackett had gone to bed, George came in to say good-night to Doll, a ceremony he had never yet omitted. He found her still seated in front of her mirror, biting the end of one of the two tremendous pigtails into which Mrs. Brackett had just plaited her hair. She wore a most becoming pale blue dressing-gown and she looked

so like a darling little girl about twelve years old that his heart smote him severely for all his economies. How was such a child to understand anything but the art of living happily? It was a sin to repress her.

He came behind her and pulled the pigtail away from her pretty teeth. "Naughty!" he said. "That's mine."

There had been something of a quarrel between them that day over a matinée which Doll had wished to attend and had attended. She turned quickly to him, hoping that this meant reconciliation.

"You lovely thing," he said tenderly. "How can I be so hard on you?"

"I don't know," she said. "How can you, George?"

He kissed her. "Doll," he said. "Don't let's quarrel, Doll."

She clung to him a moment. "I don't want to quarrel," she said. "I hate it. And I did n't enjoy that matinée a bit."

"Poor little girl," he said. "What a shame it is! But wait till I've cleared off all my debts and then you'll see how I'll spoil you."

She pulled his sleeve with a movement rather like that of a dog that begs, with its paw, to be forgiven.

"George," she said, "I just loathe this wall-paper."

He did not kiss her again that night.

(b)

She caught a cold and was in the house two days. On the third day she insisted on going out of doors and next morning she was coughing. The cough passed, but she remained a little peaked.

"She needs a change of air," said Mrs. Brackett at lunch. "Take her to Brighton for a few days, George. I'll stay and keep house here."

"Can't possibly leave my work," said George.

"Mother could take me," said Doll. "It would do her good, too."

"We must think about it," said George. "Perhaps it can be managed, if you really feel it's necessary."

Mrs. Brackett made a small, impatient sound to which George was not unaccustomed. He looked up quickly and found his mother-in-law glaring at him.

"Do you think, George," she said, "that Doll's health is a thing that should be 'thought about'? Do you think her cure is a thing that should be 'perhaps managed'?"

Anger surged up in his breast, but he spoke coolly enough.

"I think," he said, "that Hampstead's a pretty healthy place and that Doll will get well here in her own home just as quickly as in some beastly, rooking Brighton hotel."

"Of course I will," said Doll quickly and with pathetic effect. The lowering of her generally splendid health was due much less to her cold than to the effect upon her of continual disputes. She could not thrive in a disturbed atmosphere.

Mrs. Brackett could.

"No, Doll," she said, "if your husband can't afford to send you to Brighton, *I* can take you. That Rutter left me enough to do that, at any rate. I can still find a week's board-money for my child. *I* would find it if I had to beg it on the street. Yes, or steal it."

"Oh, mother," said Doll beseechingly.

But George interrupted.

"Well," he said coldly to Mrs. Brackett, "I think that would be very nice, you know; and I'm sure Doll will be very grateful to you."

So Mrs. Brackett took Doll to Brighton. They were gone ten days, for the first two of which Doll was miserable. But her mother talked and poor Doll listened and there was no George to help her. She returned in brilliant health and thoroughly convinced that she had done the right thing. She greeted George affectionately, forgivingly, and George was so glad to get her back again that he did not even notice this attitude. Then she exclaimed with genuine delight over the flowers he had bought for her return and he told himself that all was going to be well again.

He was mistaken, of course. The mischief between these two was more than a week's absence and a few flowers could remedy. He believed himself right in doing the best he could for Doll; she believed herself right in doing the best she could for herself. No compromise was possible. As for surrender, neither of them thought of it for a moment. George's love for Doll made him, for once in his life, utterly obstinate. Doll's conception of what was due to a wife from her husband had the same effect upon her. So time went on and the disputes grew more frequent and more bitter day by day.

(3)

What made the situation still more odious to George was that he had the whip hand. Such money as was spent he provided. Doll depended on him for every-

thing and came to him for everything, from the month's housekeeping to the price of tickets to a Subscription Ball or permission to order a new lot of photographs. It seemed to him sometimes that she must spend all her time in imagining ways of getting rid of money; whereas, even lacking Mrs. Brackett's help, Doll, without repeating herself, could have provided every minute of a year with its new extravagance.

Continually he was being forced to say no, to plead with her to give up some costly idea or other.

Mrs. Brackett naturally afforded her the very best possible excuse for spending money. Though Doll had always thought it perfectly right to let her mother do everything for her, from providing her with every luxury to cleaning, if necessary, her boots, she had never acquired the slightest contempt for Mrs. Brackett. Having never learned to think for herself, having always left to her mother every decision that threatened to cost any trouble, she was almost wholly dominated by the little woman, and nobody is contemptuous of that which rules him.

Their relations were something like those which may be taken to exist between an extravagant, pleasure-loving, quite unambitious young king and his late father's (now his own) trusted Chief Minister. So long as the young gentleman is allowed to have all the amusement he requires, he is content to let himself be governed in all things political and consequently tedious. The old fox provides the money; it is only fair that he should have the power, for what it is worth, and the trouble that accompanies it. But this young king does not despise this Chief Minister.

Yet though she was dominated by her mother in all things, where her personal desires were not strong or her personal convenience did not need to be consulted, and though she was aware that in all others she exercised complete power, Doll's affection for Mrs. Brackett was very great. All her life she had looked to her mother for every good thing and never had her mother denied her any wish of her heart; it was not wonderful that she loved the dispenser of benefits.

Doll's affection, then, prompted her continually to provide amusements for this mother who was a guest in her house. Mrs. Brackett was unhappy; needed distraction. What more natural than that Doll should wish to give it to her? Now, London provides an immense number of distractions, and every day the newspaper suggested to Doll some new way of helping her mother to forget her misfortunes. And every new way cost money. And money could only be obtained from George. And George was trying to economise.

You can see the horrible position in which he was placed. If he provided these sums, where was his economy? If he refused them, in what light did he appear?

If Mrs. Brackett had not been so unfortunately generous in the past, it might have been much easier for him to check Doll's attempts to entertain her; but Mrs. Brackett had poured out her purse into Doll's lap and no one could accuse her of the drying-up of that golden source.

Every day Doll discovered some pleasant and expensive method of entertaining her mother; every day George was obliged to argue the matter. Sometimes she proved reasonable; gave up her plan with a sigh. At

other times she fought fiercely, wept, reproached George with meanness, with hostility to Mrs. Brackett; sometimes she even got her way and then she would be all smiles again. But always was George compelled to hear something of this kind, spoken with either a sigh or a frown: "Poor mother. She's done so much for me. It's a pity I can't make up to her, now that she can't do it any longer." This was the burden of Doll's lay just as in the case of Mrs. Brackett (when she was urging George to extravagance in Doll's behalf) it was, "If only I had n't lost all my money."

Had George not been so busy he would have been ready to cut his throat; but there was much profitable painting to be done and he was getting rid of his debts in a very satisfactory manner, much more satisfactory than he had ever hoped. He thought he saw the end of this detestable state of affairs at a distance now of about eighteen months or rather less. He was always calculating the arrival of that happy day when he would be able to say to Doll: "Now, then. Our feet are clear and you can order your car this afternoon." For all the poor devil wanted was to let his wife be as extravagant as she pleased.

So the time dragged on for him, divided between strenuous painting, weary argument over little extravagances, quarrels, each one a little more bitter than the last and reconciliations each than the last a little less complete; until at length Doll had come to look upon George as thoroughly stingy and he upon her as hopelessly thriftless, inconsiderate, and foolish. It would be idle to pretend that she was as fond of him as when they married; but — and here is the amazing feature of this

case — he, when he was not actually disputing with her, adored her more than ever.

I need not go into his sentiments towards Mrs. Brackett, further than to say that if the little woman seldom let a day pass by without crying, "If only that Rutter had not put it out of my power!" George as frequently exclaimed to his soul, "If only that Rutter had murdered her as well, and made a really good job of it!"

(4)

The crown was put upon his satisfaction with existence when one day Mrs. Brackett informed him that she was not going back to America. "Life at home," she explained, "would be impossible on the reduced scale that I must now look forward to. Any one who has held the position in New York Society that I have held, George, cannot contemplate living in her own city as a poor woman. It would n't be possible. No, I must face this matter, George. I must make up my mind to exile."

George, his face aghast and his heart like lead, began to say that he thought her decision a very sensible one, but she interrupted him with her crowing little laugh.

"Oh," she said, "don't be afraid, my poor George, that I'm going to quarter myself on you. No. My pride would n't let me do anything like that. So long as I've enough to live on I won't ask any one for a cent of help. And mercifully I have enough to live on in a modest way in London. It will be difficult, but not so difficult as to try to do it at home. And I shall have the consolation of feeling that I'm close to my darling child. I may not be able to help you to surround her with all the luxuries

she needs and craves, poor dear, but at least I shall be beside her, if ever she needs a mother's love and sympathy and advice. And so," she concluded, "I'm taking a little apartment near by — it's just down on the High Street — so Doll can run in at any time."

George said that that was splendid.

CHAPTER X

(1)

HILDA and Otis came back from America in October and settled down at once in their Grosvenor Street house. After their summer in the mountains they were both prodigiously well, as brown as Indians, and as happy as it is possible to be. Their condition was an added offence to poor Doll, because she was not at all happy and consequently did not feel at all well. Long-continued discord is more hostile to the vitality of such a girl than a severe illness. She could only thrive in the sun.

The first entertainment that Hilda gave was a family dinner-party. Mrs. March came from Brockenhurst especially for it; George, Doll, and Mrs. Brackett were the other guests. Nobody enjoyed it except Mrs. March, with whom the fostering of family affection was a sort of religion. The exceedingly comfortable circumstances of the Gardners were too obviously manifest for Doll and her mother to be happy. Therefore George was not happy. As for Hilda and Otis, though they did not know what was the matter, they were uncomfortably aware of failure. Otis found George dull after dinner. Hilda had some difficulty in keeping things going in the drawing-room. She talked mostly about America with Mrs. Brackett, while Mrs. March knitted peaceably in a corner, and Doll said nothing and did nothing but occupy her eyes with the advantages of Hilda's drawing-room.

Mrs. March stayed two nights and then returned to

Brockenhurst. She would willingly have remained a year with her daughter, but she recognised the fact that Hilda was married now. Yet many people thought Mrs. March rather a stupid old lady.

A day or two later Hilda, coming out of her hairdresser's in Bond Street, ran plump into Dick Crewe. Before she had had time to think, she had greeted him with all the evidences of the pleasure which the meeting gave her. She had always been very fond of Dick.

Next moment she realised that she was doing the very thing which Otis and she had agreed not to do.

(2)

It is not to be supposed that Otis had kept from his wife certain suspicions which had troubled him during the early part of the year. As a member of the March family, no less than as a very old friend of the Bracketts, he had felt obliged to tell Hilda that, in his opinion, Dick Crewe was in love with Doll and had thereby made himself a person whose acquaintance it was desirable for Doll's sister-in-law to abandon.

"Fair play to him," he had said. "I think he's done all he knows to keep out of her way. If he's let alone, he'll probably get over it satisfactorily enough. I think he's a very fine fellow and I'm not blaming him for being knocked out by that girl's eyes. Who would I be to blame him? Don't I know their power? Is n't it only by the peculiar mercy of Heaven that I'm not married to her myself, Hilda? Well, what I say is, if he's trying to keep out of her way, don't let's do anything to prevent him. He's up against something pretty stiff, poor devil,

and he'll have a use for all the chances that there are in his favour. So long as he can keep away from her and never see her, there's no danger — I'm sure of it. All he wants is to be let alone to convalesce. And don't think that Doll's to blame in this. She is n't. I'll bet she does n't care a bean for Crewe. But she can't help being fallen in love with, and it's happened so often that she's come to think that it's a matter of no importance to anybody, least of all to her. She'd be ever so sorry if she thought Crewe was in love with her; but she would n't be impressed, not for a cent. She'd just hope that he'd be sensible and get over it quickly and marry some nice girl, like the others have always done. Oh, I've no fear for Doll. It's Crewe I'm scared for. And I propose that we let him slide when we get back to England, Hilda. It'll make one less house where he'll be likely to run into Doll."

To this Hilda had agreed, regretfully enough.

And here she was on the pavement of Bond Street, shaking Dick vigorously by the hand, beaming upon him in sheer pleasure at this unexpected meeting, sympathising with him in the loss of his mother, and in every way giving him to understand that she desired nothing so much as the continuance of his friendship.

(3)

No doubt if Hilda had been perfectly wise, the moment she realised what she had done, she would have dropped Dick like a hot coal and fled from his undesirable presence. But Hilda was not perfectly wise — she was much too warm-hearted — and the excellent reso-

lutions which she had made in America did not prove strong enough to resist the appeal of Dick's obvious dejection. It was simply beyond her to cut an old friend who looked so miserable. She continued to talk with Dick.

If Dick had been perfectly wise, he would have fled from Doll's sister-in-law; but it is hardly necessary for me to say that Dick was not perfectly wise. If he had been, there would have been no need for him to flee from Doll's sister-in-law. So he continued to talk with Hilda.

Together they moved up Bond Street in the direction of Grosvenor Street. And when they reached Hilda's house door, it was not in Hilda to prevent herself from asking him in. You cannot, however wisely your husband has counselled you, leave on your doorstep just at tea-time, an old friend whom you have not seen for six months and whose mother has died meanwhile.

So Hilda, in her unwisdom, asked Dick to come in, and Dick, in his, accepted the invitation. It was a god-send to the poor soul. Though Beaulieu, without his mother, had become a place impossible to inhabit, London, where he was now trying to settle down, was proving very little better. Not that he did not know plenty of people in London; not that London did not offer him all sorts of distractions. He had that within him which made the society of these people — of almost any people — undesirable; that which made the distractions of London only too distracting. He was wretched and there was an end of it; he would have been wretched anywhere; but with the good Hilda he found himself a little less wretched than usual. She was a very old friend. And I dare say, because he was a very great fool, he

hoped to hear something about Doll from her. If this was so, he was disappointed. Hilda said nothing about Doll and George; to that extent she was wise; and he had not the courage to mention them.

Hilda's design was to give him tea, show him her new house, cheer him up generally, and send him back to Beaulieu, but without urging him to come and see her again. So much she felt herself obliged to do. She was unaware that he was living in London. She discovered this after he had been in the house about a quarter of an hour and the discovery upset her a good deal. If she had known that, she would never have asked him in; never. But the mischief was done and she had to make the best of it. While she was doing so, the drawing-room door opened and her maid announced Mrs. Brackett and Mrs. George March. They had come to pay the call which Mrs. Brackett's strict sense of etiquette had prescribed as a return for the family dinner-party.

Hilda did not lose her head. After they had all greeted one another,—Doll was delighted to see Dick and reproached him for never having returned to Hampstead,—and after the two ladies had been provided with tea, she engaged Doll in an active conversation about nothing in particular and left Dick to Mrs. Brackett.

Mrs. Brackett was charmed to renew her acquaintance with Sir Richard. Dick did what he could to suggest an equal pleasure. With his eyes on Doll he responded, not too mechanically, to the observations of the lady whom he was supposed to be entertaining, while, within himself, he cursed his folly in ever crossing the threshold of this house. Yet it was quite impossible for him to get up and go away.

He was conscious, too, that Doll did not look quite so brilliant as usual, and this made him thoughtful.

Other visitors were announced, friends of Otis, a Mrs. and Miss Weldon, a mother and daughter, paying a call of ceremony upon the wife of Otis. Hilda took the mother and gave the daughter to Doll, who, of course, wanted to talk to the only man in the room. The conversation of these two did not flourish; would, indeed, have died, had not Miss Weldon been an uncommonly affable girl.

Dick and Mrs. Brackett continued to talk to one another.

They had already exhausted what they had to say about Mrs. March and the New Forest, the only subjects which they had in common. He had told her that he lived in London now. She had told him that she had been such and such a time in England. He had asked whether the Georges were in their new house yet and she had said, yes; and they had exchanged some observations relative to the new house. It was dull work and Dick would have been very glad to be done with it; but his legs refused to straighten themselves and carry him out of the room. So long as Doll was there (for his eyes' delight), so long he must endure the conversation of her mother.

Mrs. Brackett could no longer refrain from talking about Doll; nor did she know that there was any slightest reason why she should not.

"And how do you think my Doll's looking?" she asked.

"Oh, splendid, of course," said Dick. "It's easy to see that marriage agrees with her." This is the sort of

thing that one naturally says in reply to that sort of question; but it was not at all what Mrs. Brackett had desired him to say. She was so ridden by the idea that Doll was ill and miserable that she had overlooked the possibility of Dick's being polite. It irritated her that this young man should be so blind. It did not occur to her that he might not be as blind as he seemed.

"You think so?" she said bitterly.

The ears, like the eyes, of a young man in Dick's situation are extraordinarily sharp. What was this? He withdrew his eyes from Doll and stared at Mrs. Brackett.

"Of course," he said.

"Oh," she replied, "of course. Of course." She finished her cup of tea angrily and handed it to him. He put it on the table by his elbow, without ceasing to stare at her.

Dick's thoughts budded, blossomed, and bore fruit with a speed in which the Indian juggler's mango is left hopelessly behind.

"Do you mean — ?" he began, unconsciously lowering his voice and moving an inch or two nearer to her. There was a sudden eagerness in his eyes.

Mrs. Brackett realised that she had behaved foolishly. It was not for her to advertise the fact of Doll's unhappiness.

"Why, Sir Richard," she said brightly, "I suppose I can't expect strangers to have as sharp sight, where my little girl is concerned, as I have. The fact is that she's not been too well lately. I dare say I'm overanxious. That's only to be expected, is n't it? But if you knew her as I do you would n't think her looking 'splendid.'" She gave him a quick look to see if she had succeeded. He was

aware of what she did and, understanding her desire, said: "I'm sorry to hear that. Hampstead ought to agree with her if any place does."

"Oh," she said, "of course there's nothing serious. She's just a little run down. You see she's been in London practically all summer. I took her away to the ocean for a week or two, but that's not enough. You see she's always been accustomed to a long change in the summer. But of course if it could n't be managed, it could n't. George has been so busy this year." Again the bitterness crept into her voice.

"That's good," said Dick.

"Oh, of course," she said, and for the life of her she could n't help giving him to understand that she had not expressed her whole thought. Nor could Dick help wondering what it had been.

Doll got up. "Mother," she said, "we must be off." She began to make her farewells. So did Mrs. Brackett. Hilda congratulated herself on having managed her crisis as satisfactorily as possible.

If Dick had been perfectly wise, he would not have come out of his corner to open the door for these ladies. But it is impossible to be perfectly wise and at the same time enjoy any kind of reputation for possessing good manners. Dick naturally followed his instincts rather than his reason, and in consequence found himself within a foot or two of Doll when he had much better have kept the length of the room between them.

As she held out her hand to him graciously she said, "I hope you'll be up in town again soon and will come and see us."

He was obliged to own that he lived in London now.

She was charmed to hear it. "Why," she said, "that's fine. We must see a whole lot of you, Sir Richard. George'll be the most delighted man. Won't he, mother? So when'll you come?"

Hilda stopped dead in something of no importance that she was saying to Mrs. Weldon. With a strong effort she forced herself to finish her sentence. Then, while the other said something equally devoid of interest, she heard from the door the following short dialogue.

"Oh, one of these days, if I may, I shall be delighted."

"Well, one of these days is none of these days. George won't forgive me if I don't fix you up right now. Say lunch to-morrow."

"I'm afraid I can't to-morrow, Mrs. George."

"Well, what about next day?"

Then — after a barely perceptible pause — "Thank you. I shall be delighted."

"So shall we. Till then, then. Come along, mother."

I will not apologise for reporting these most ordinary sentences. It is not always what people say that lends interest to their conversation.

Dick shut the door, came back to the tea-table, and began industriously to entertain Miss Weldon. He succeeded so thoroughly that the poor girl, who was rather plain and rather stupid, began to imagine all sorts of wonderful and delicious things. Her mother took her away all too soon. Dick said good-bye at the same time and Hilda was left to her reflections.

Until she had made a clean breast of her misdemeanour to Otis, who came home an hour later, she was acutely miserable. Otis made light of it, because he was never the man to cry over spilt milk, and Hilda needed comforting

badly, and it was very pleasant to comfort Hilda. But, within himself, he was greatly disturbed.

As for Doll, she was enchanted to think that that nice Sir Richard was coming to lunch.

(4)

It is one thing to rob an old friend of his wife; it is another to save the girl you love from misery; though, as matters fall out in this complicated life, it may easily happen that the action in each case is identical; which shows that things which are equal to the same thing may be radically opposed to one another; which again shows that Science does not know everything; which is a very comforting thought nowadays.

So long as Dick Crewe could look on Doll as George's happy wife, he was safe. It is a wonderful advantage to be brought up in the way one should go and a respectable early environment has kept more men from shipwreck than the cynics would have us believe. Human nature, like other plants, is entitled to demand a good start if it is to grow worthily, and, given that advantage, it is more likely to do well than badly. The Code of a Gentleman is a thing easy to laugh at, but all the proofs of its weakness are in evidence, whereas those of its strength are never brought to light. If a cavalry officer cheats at cards he has to quit his regiment; but if, with equal temptation, he abstains, no one hears anything about it. How many young gentlemen might have figured in the Divorce Court but for the possession of a Code, it is of course impossible to estimate; yet I think it is safe to suppose that the number exceeds considerably that of the young gentlemen

whose Code has failed to keep them out of that particular part of the limelight. So long, then, as Dick could look on Doll as George's happy wife, he was safe.

It became a different story the moment his point of view was changed. Quite apart from their friendship, the belief that George was necessary to Doll's happiness would have kept Dick in the straight and narrow path. Let us assume — for it is unsafe to dogmatise on such points — that it would have continued to do, as it had so far done, this. I ask no more credit for Dick than he deserves. He had fought a good fight against great odds, armed with nothing but his Code and his affection for George to meet the assault of his own desire; and so far he had succeeded pretty well. It is probable that he would have continued to succeed. I say no more than that.

But it was not to be supposed that our old friend the Devil, who, like other people, has his self-respect to consider, would view Dick's success with indifference. Who was this horsey young aristocrat to set himself up as a person superior to temptation? Him and his Code! Something had decidedly to be done about it.

To cause Dick to be loitering on the pavement of Bond Street just as Hilda came out of her hairdresser's and to inspire Mrs. Brackett with the resolution to be polite on the same afternoon, this was simplicity itself. Such manipulations are a matter of every-day routine with the Diplomatist in question. To employ Hilda's anxiety for her brother and Mrs. Brackett's love for her child was a stroke at once more subtle and more pleasing to his fancy. The seed of doubt having once been sown in the proper place, the desired result might be regarded as already

achieved. Henceforward things might be left to work themselves out in their own way and at their own time. The maximum of gain with the minimum of effort is the rule of all successful businesses.

In other words, with the entry into his mind of the suspicion that George was not making Doll happy, Dick's Code became a weapon in the hands of the Adversary. The pursuit of Doll as his friend's happy wife had been to Dick a crime; the rescue of Doll from a life of wretchedness became a duty. The only question necessary to be decided was whether or no her life was one of wretchedness. Till this moment he had had no reason to suppose that it was, and had never so much as entertained the idea. He still had no reason to believe it, but the idea had been entertained, and once entertained it must be either confirmed or expelled. No other course was open to him. To go once more into exile accompanied by this doubt was beyond him. Exile from her was sufficiently dreadful, though, for her sake and George's, it could be faced; but the possibility that he might be deserting her in her need could not. Of course he assumed that she might have need of him, which he had no earthly cause for doing; but unless he assumed so much, he had no case at all, and there was nothing for him but exile; and, as I have explained, exile had now become a thing not to be contemplated.

It was necessary for Dick to know if she was happy.

It was necessary for him to keep his engagement to luncheon at The Lawn.

And keep it he did.

(5)

George could be trusted to make a great fuss of his friend. He had, it is true, been rather hurt by Dick's abandonment of him. Only once at Hampstead since the wedding! It was not the right way for Dick to behave; not at all the right way. Of course, the fellow had been out of England a good deal and all that; but, making every allowance for this, he ought surely to have found time to come and see them a little oftener than once. But now they had got him it was not the time to nurse grudges. Poor old devil, with his mother dead, Beaulieu made impossible to him, lost in London; it was a dismal case. He must be made more than ever welcome. He must be encouraged to come to The Lawn continually; to make it a second home. You can imagine the way a good-hearted, affectionate creature like George would regard the situation.

He was very unfavourably impressed by Dick's appearance. The fellow, he told himself, looked thoroughly down on his luck. He had never run much to fat, but he had never been haggard. And now, 'haggard' was the word. His eyes were positively sunk in his head. He had lost that healthy, hearty look of his altogether. His cheeks were hollow and there were lines about his mouth that had never been there before. George, as a painter of portraits, could not fail to notice these things. He would never have supposed that the loss of his mother would have meant so much to poor old Dick. Clearly London did n't agree with him at all. But if he could n't stay in Beaulieu he could n't and that was all about it. Yet, if he must come and live in London what a precious lucky

thing it was that he had friends there who would be glad to see him any time. Poor old moping thing! He must be taken in hand; shaken up; jollied up. To allow him to go round with this death's head on his shoulders was n't possible at all.

His welcome of Dick was boisterous. He shook him by the hand enthusiastically, slapped him on the back, punched him in the chest, did everything but fold him in his arms and kiss him. And he would have done this, too, if it had been in the least permissible for one English gentleman so to treat another. Instead he dragged him to the studio, mixed a cocktail for him, gave him a cigarette, and enveloped him generally in an atmosphere of complete hospitality.

Dick accepted these demonstrations as well as he could. The Code made it difficult to respond properly, but George was much too excited and happy to notice any lack of warmth from which Dick's manner may have suffered.

Doll came into the studio and greeted their guest kindly. It gave her sincere pleasure to see him, for she had always liked him very well. And she was sorry for him. He certainly looked ill, and evidently the death of that nice old Lady Crewe had made a whole heap of difference to him. She liked him for that. As we know, she approved of young men being fond of their mothers.

She led the way into the dining-room and exerted herself to be amiable. She wished to make Sir Richard understand that he was very, very welcome and would be so whenever he should choose to come. Her heart was touched by his rather desperate eyes. She was very, very sorry for him and so she was very, very kind to him.

George produced champagne in honour of the occasion, urged Dick to eat and drink, laughed, talked, indulged in anticipations of the many future meals which Dick was to take with them.

"Now you're living in London," he said, "there'll be no excuse for you. Twenty minutes in a taxi will bring you here and you'll have no confounded train to catch. If you don't come often I'll have your life, Dick. We'll cut you off our list, won't we, Doll?" And Doll said that they certainly would.

Dick laughed and drank his champagne (of which he was very glad) and said that he would take care not to incur Mrs. George's displeasure. The conversation went quite comfortably. They talked of Africa, America, Hilda's house, George's commissions, Mrs. March, the latest play (which Dick had seen and Doll had not), and other things of the kind. It was just conversation, pleasant enough to make; not the sort of thing about which any one else wants to hear.

But while Dick's lips were busy forming and emitting amiable insipidities one after the other, his eyes and ears were strained (though no one would have supposed it) to discover evidence in support of that suspicion which had brought him to sit at George's table; to find an answer to the question which had now become the ruling influence of his life — Was she happy?

It must be said that he failed utterly to achieve any result of the sort.

Mrs. Brackett's departure from The Lawn to her little flat in the High Street of Hampstead had not been without its good effect on the relations of George and Doll. Ever since the removal of that irritation George had been

a different creature. He had been so grateful to Providence for ridding his house of his mother-in-law that he had found no room yet for complaint that she remained in London. His heart had expanded like a bud in spring-time; his economies had been temporarily forgotten and he had not frowned upon a single small extravagance which Doll had proposed. Work continued to be offered to him; he was getting, without trouble, the higher prices which he had resolved to ask. Doll, because he was in such a good temper, was also in a good temper. He believed that his troubles were over.

During the whole luncheon there was not one incident which could give Dick any reason to suppose that this marriage had not turned out as well as possible. George was obviously in the best spirits; Doll was the same. Indeed, she was greatly pleased to have this nice Sir Richard to lunch with them; and George was going to take her to the theatre that evening.

Dick told himself that he had nothing to do here. His suspicion had been wrong. There must be no more visits to this house.

Meanwhile George had conceived a plan which, as soon as they were comfortably established in the studio, smoking and drinking coffee, he proposed. That is to say, he imagined that he himself had conceived this plan; but the hand of the Adversary is too clearly perceptible here for us to be in any doubt as to its origin. The good George found himself much concerned for his friend and was delighted to have discovered a means of bringing him often to The Lawn. That was what Dick needed, to have his friends stand by him, at this time; to be made to feel that the world was not an entirely gloomy, lonely place.

"Dickie," he said, "I want you to do me a favour. Come and sit to me. Let me paint you."

"Me?" cried Dick, aghast. "Me?" It would be a long day before he ever came to this house again.

"You, Dickie. Just you."

"No, George," said Dick resolutely. "Nothing will induce —"

"Oh, yes, it will. And, first of all, you may understand that as you're not going to pay for this portrait, you're not going to own it. I want it for myself. Do you know that I've no picture of you but one rotten snapshot about ten years old? Well, I'm going to have something rather better than that. You shall hang up there, Dickie," — he pointed to a place on the studio wall. "Then I'll have you on one side of me, when I'm working, and Doll on the other" — he indicated Doll's picture. "You're not going to deny me, are you? In fact, I won't be denied. You've nothing to do all day, and you may as well do this. I'll only ask for ten sittings and you can lunch with us after each of them. Tell him to say yes, Doll."

"You'd better say yes, Sir Richard," said Doll. "Don't you see that he's quite determined?"

"Yes," said George, "I'm quite determined. You don't know how determined I can be when I please. But," he added with a laugh, "Doll can tell you, — eh, Doll?" He was so happy in his good intentions towards Dick and in his repossession of Dick and in the improved condition of his own domestic atmosphere that he could dare to say this. You are to remember that he believed all his troubles to be over. Moreover, he had just lunched admirably and his cigar drew well. The Adversary neglects no trifles.

At his last words Doll's face had clouded.

"No," she said, and she suddenly jerked her just-lit cigarette into the fire. "How should *he* know?"

In an instant there had rushed into her memory a hundred disputes which the past few unclouded days had almost wiped out. That George could joke about their quarrels seemed to her odious. Tears rose to her eyes, she got up quickly and went out of the room.

George was in despair. He perceived that he had hurt her and he understood how he had done it. Inwardly he cursed the sensitive nature of woman. Now, when Dick should be gone, he must go to her and win her forgiveness. It would be a long business. He cursed himself for a tactless fool. Involuntarily he sighed.

The incident had been too marked easily to be ignored, but they ignored it. For George, explanation was impossible; for Dick, to seek it was equally impossible. After a short, constrained silence George returned to the attack. — "Well," he said, "what do you say? When'll you give me your first sitting, old man?"

Dick looked on the floor. "To-morrow," he said in rather a stilted way, "if that will be convenient to you."

"Why not now?" said George to whom work, at the moment, would have been a godsend.

"No," said Dick, "not now. I must be getting along now."

He rose and held out his hand and George did n't try to keep him.

"Eleven o'clock, then," he said, "and you stay to lunch."

"Yes," said Dick, "that will be splendid."

CHAPTER XI

(1)

DICK had his journey for his pains next day, for Doll was out to lunch at the house of that young woman whom, you may remember, she met in her club and took to tea at Rumplemeyer's. The portrait was begun and a second sitting was arranged for a few days later. This second expedition to Hampstead yielded a greater result. Doll was at lunch. So was Mrs. Brackett.

George was to take them that afternoon to the Ball Game, and they were both, consequently, in the best possible spirits.

To the good American, residence in England must always be clouded by the lack of one peculiar form of excitement. There is no baseball to be seen. What we can offer in the way of cricket and football says nothing to him or, for that matter, to her. Cricket is really not worth talking about; he, or she, finds it of much less interest than Swedish drill. Our football, to be sure, is a little more amusing, but the percentage of casualties is too small to make it seem like a game; for, to any one who has been brought up on American college football, there is no pastime in all Europe, unless it be the Spanish bull-fight, which can be said to be truly stimulating. Still, the winter months, in this country of ours, do provide a sort of mild substitute for the contemporary transatlantic spectacle. But our football once over, the

Americans in England are in a bad way. They have nothing to amuse them. Nothing at all.

This being the case, it had occurred to a certain astute Philadelphian that there would be money in shipping, so soon as the baseball season in America should be at an end, a couple of first-rate baseball teams to England, there to play a series of matches. This was accordingly done, and now was the American element in London stirred to its depths by the prospect of witnessing the President of Games, as played, right here, by the Pink Sox of Brooklyn and the Big Guys of Providence, Rhode Island.

You may be sure that Doll was not going to be left out of that; nor was Mrs. Brackett. They meant to be there, with their little flags, if it rained jack-knives.

George in his present optimistic humour had made no difficulty; tickets had been procured for three thoroughly advantageous seats; and now nothing remained but to swallow their food and get under way for the battle-field.

While Doll was trying to explain baseball to Dick, a sudden inspiration came to George. Had he been going to attend this match in Doll's company alone nothing could have kept him from it. Mrs. Brackett's presence, however, had by this time become so irritating to him that he looked forward gloomily to his afternoon, and though, when Doll had first proposed the expedition he had gladly consented to go, he had for some days been wishing that he had not done so. And now his eye dwelt morosely on his mother-in-law and his thoughts were busy with the difference between what might have been and what was going to be; and the contrast was so

painful to him that it caused him to think longingly of his lonely studio, and dutifully of some work which he had meant to neglect, and unselfishly of the good that it would do poor old, moping Dick to go to this baseball game in his place. And so he said: "My dear Dick, you may listen to explanations of baseball till you're black in the face, but you'll make nothing of them. When I was in America at least six different enthusiasts endeavoured to enlighten me and I am still no further advanced than the belief that it is a sort of glorified rounders. That I have grasped, but the rest is beyond me. Now, why don't you take my ticket and go to this match with Mrs. Brackett and Doll? Then you'll know all about it."

Dick, of course, said that he would do nothing of the kind.

Doll was silent, but she looked and felt hurt.

"My conscience," George went on, "has been uneasy all morning about this match. I really ought n't to go. There's a good light to-day, and I ought to be working. I can't expect good light much longer at this time of the year and I ought to make the most of what Heaven sends me."

"That's so," said Mrs. Brackett, who was by no means anxious to have George with her and Doll, and who was extremely anxious that George should make money fast. "It's been on my conscience, too, George," she added. "We've no right to take you away from your work, just for our amusement."

At that George almost resolved to go, if only to spite her; but he was saved from plumbing that depth by Doll's saying slowly, "Yes, that's so." Then he be-

came convinced that Doll did n't want his company (as Doll had become convinced that he did n't want hers) and he set his jaw and continued his amiable persuasion of Dick.

The ears and eyes of Dick were never idle when he was with Doll and George. What they told him on this occasion caused him to yield to George's proposal. Shortly afterwards he went away with Doll and Mrs. Brackett and George was left alone to work.

He did nothing.

(2)

In the excitement of baseball, Doll forgot George and her mother and Dick and everything else. Oh! but it was good to see a ball game again, to be surrounded by Americans again, to feel the thrill and rapture, that she knew so well, run through the big crowd of which she herself was a particle. From the moment when she entered the grounds to the moment when she left them, she seemed transported to the land which she had, of recent days, so often regretted. Dick soon abandoned any attempt to get her to talk and forced himself to respond to the civilities which her mother addressed to him from time to time, until the play began, after which, Mrs. Brackett took no notice of him whatever. So his understanding of the game which he was supposed to be witnessing was not much increased. Little he cared. Soon he gave up pretending to look at the field and concentrated his attention on Doll who, with her tiny silk American flag clutched in one hand, the flush of excitement upon her cheeks, her lovely eyes shining with

pleasure, sat by his side, leaning slightly forward and emitting, now and then, fierce little cries of encouragement to the players whom she favoured.

Steadily she munched peanuts, for, owing to the forethought of the promoter, this indispensable luxury was for sale among the spectators. Patriotism burned high in Doll that afternoon, nor could her mother's disapproval keep her from the peanuts. For her mother's sake, however, she abstained from gum.

Then Dick took them to tea at his rooms in St. James's.

Doll was now back from America again and disposed once more to be civil. Both she and Mrs. Brackett had been long enough in England to acquire the tea habit, and the tea which Dick improvised was a noble one, his rooms being close to Rumplemeyer's and his man having been granted both discrimination (by Providence) and a free hand (by Dick) in the matter of the cakes. Their little party was therefore a great success, because Doll, still hurt by George's abandonment, gave herself some trouble to repay Dick's hospitality, because Dick only asked to be allowed to entertain her, and because Mrs. Brackett, who never obtruded herself when Doll was inclined to talk, sat back, sipped her tea, and said nothing. But from time to time her eyes dwelt thoughtfully upon Dick.

When they left she asked him to come and see her in her flat.

"It's just a box," she said, "and I can't promise you a tea like this one; but if you should care to come and take pity on a poor old woman's loneliness one afternoon, why, Sir Richard, I shall be very glad to see you."

"I'll bring him down next time he lunches with us,"

said Doll. "What day did George fix for your next sitting?"

He told her, and so it was arranged.

(3)

When they had driven away in a cab from Dick's door Mrs. Brackett asked: "What was that you said about Sir Richard's next sitting? Is George painting him, then?"

"Did n't you know?" said Doll. "Yes, George wants a picture of him and he's letting him do it. And he always lunches with us after the sittings. George thinks it'll be good for the poor fellow and so do I. He needs company more than anything. It's so bad for a man to live in London and never see anybody, especially when he's sad."

"What size is the picture?" enquired Mrs. Brackett. "Full length, I hope."

"Why? What does it matter?"

"Well, Doll, it matters a good deal, I should say. Does n't a painter charge more for a big picture than a small one?"

"Oh," said Doll, "of course, George is n't doing it for money. You would n't expect him to ask Sir Richard to pay. Why, mother, it was George's suggestion. Sir Richard's doing it as a favour. George *wants* a picture of him for the studio."

Mrs. Brackett was silent for a few moments, but her fingers tapped her knee impatiently.

"Do you mean to tell me, Doll," she said at last, "that your husband is wasting his time just now — *just now*, Doll — over gratuitous portraits?"

"Oh," said Doll, "this is rather out of the way. You see Sir Richard's such a very old friend. And it is n't only that, mother. George has rather made this an excuse for getting Sir Richard up to The Lawn. *I* think it's rather dear of George." So she did, and George's desertion of her that afternoon was of too old a date to influence her opinion now. It was never easy for Doll long to bear a grudge.

"Well!" said Mrs. Brackett with great emphasis. She sat silent while the cab sped a hundred yards. Then she said: "I'll tell you what *I* think it is. You say it's dear of George. I say it's criminal. Here he is in debt,—though it's not for me to blame him for that,—but anyhow he *is* in debt, Doll, though if he had any kind of consideration for you, my poor dear lamb, he would n't be. And until he's out of debt, he's going to make you skimp and save and go without all the things that you need to complete yourself — your car and I don't know what all, Doll. And he asks us to believe that his one ambition is to pay off his debts quickly, so you can have all these things. And this afternoon he abruptly and, I may say, most rudely, declines, on the plea of work, to take you to that ball game. I'm not the woman to stand in the way of any man who wants to work. It's a thing that George has n't shown himself so eager to do that I should make any difficulty about letting him do it when he does seem inclined that way. And now you tell me that he's been wasting all this morning over a portrait that is n't going to bring him a cent. Why, Doll, it's outrageous. I never heard anything so absurd and wrong. You'd think George would have more sense than to go on the way he's doing. Refusing you the

things you need on the plea of economy, and then spending all his days throwing away money with both hands! Why, I dare say the mere canvas and paints that he'll use for the portrait will cost him twenty or thirty dollars. I was asking him about the expense of painting materials once when I was up at your home, and I know something about it. How many sittings is he giving Sir Richard?"

"I think about ten," said Doll. She had not hitherto thought about Sir Richard's portrait at all, except to approve of George's kind intentions, and this view of her mother's was quite new to her. And it had all the strong advantage of novelty.

"Ten!" cried Mrs. Brackett. "And at two hours apiece! Twenty hours and the price of a portrait, if he'd been doing a stranger, all thrown away and nothing but his own pleasure consulted! He wants a portrait of his oldest friend, does he? Well, my Doll wants her automobile. Why, I never heard of such selfishness! And Sir Richard needs society, does he? Oh, yes. Where Sir Richard's concerned, George can be very thoughtful, can't he? He does n't seem to think that his wife'll want a new set of furs this winter. Do you suppose, Doll, that an *American* would let his wife suffer for the sake of any one else? Thank God! that's not the custom of *our* men."

Thus she talked, the blinded little woman, and thus she continued to talk all the way to Hampstead, while Doll lay back silent in the corner of the cab, with a frown on her brow that deepened and deepened in a manner that would have alarmed her mother (always so careful of the girl's beauty) had she noticed it. But Mrs. Brackett was too busy with Doll's wrongs to observe

the danger to Doll's loveliness; and this is saying a great deal.

Erect on the seat, her hard eyes staring ahead, unseeing, her nostrils dilated, her lips compressed, and the paint red upon her white face, the doting mother talked and talked. She was bitterly angry.

"Never, never, never, shall I forgive myself," she concluded as the cab stopped at her flat, "for letting you marry that man."

She had never before spoken of George as "that man." The circumstance marks a stage.

(4)

This unfortunate portrait of Dick had at last given Mrs. Brackett a sort of case against George. Hitherto, though she had been able to accuse him of stinginess, timidity, and a number of other faults, there had always been in his favour the assumption that he was, according to his poor-spirited English lights, acting for the best in Doll's interests. If he denied her things that she wanted, it was that he might the sooner be out of debt and the sooner able to indulge her desires. If he refused to sell his stock or borrow the money necessary to pay his furnishing bills, it was that he feared, on her account, to risk his savings. In all this an anxiety for Doll's future could be seen; or, at any rate, it was impossible to disprove that this was the reason for his conduct.

Dick's portrait was a different matter. Here George was evidently consulting his own wishes and the welfare of his friend at Doll's expense. Time was being wasted, money was being lost, that he might give himself

pleasure, that Sir Richard Crewe might be encouraged to take a less gloomy view of existence. Mrs. Brackett found it hard to decide which of these two motives was the worse. It did n't very much matter. The circumstance on which her maternal instinct fastened was that, by painting this portrait, George was deliberately postponing the day of Doll's complete comfort. That it might be postponed only a few weeks or even days was of no importance. A principle was at stake. Doll's happiness was no longer first with her husband.

From the moment of this discovery Mrs. Brackett's indignation against George became formidable. She had disliked him for some time; now she detested him; and the knowledge that she had allowed Doll to marry him made her life a misery to her. By so doing she had done the greatest conceivable injury to the thing that she loved best in all the world; it would be more true to say the only thing that she loved in all the world. Continually she was tortured with vain self-reproaches and vainer regrets. If she had only not allowed it! If Doll had only married some good, hard-working, generous American! Half her nights she spent in going over the names and reputed incomes of those many wealthy gentlemen, in her own country, who had asked Doll to marry them. If it had been such a one, Doll would now be a Queen of such and such a city, with her country home in such and such a fashionable locality. If it had been such another, Doll would now be in Rome, placed high in Diplomatic Society. A third would have carried her to a palace on the Pacific Coast; Los Angeles would have been at her feet. With a fourth she would have held Boston in the hollow of her hand. Even if it

had been Otis Gardner —! Look at him and that Hilda, with their fine Mayfair house and their automobiles and their Adirondack camp! And they were going to the Mediterranean, soon, for the winter! Oh! what chances she had let her Doll miss!

As for this painter fellow —!

Here Mrs. Brackett would fling herself over in her bed and moisten her pillow with unavailing tears. Sometimes she bit it.

She grew thinner and slighter than ever through the loss of sleep and appetite which her worries caused.

And every time she saw Doll — and this was every day — she harped upon her one merciless string; and every time Doll left her the poor girl's resentment against her husband had sunk a little deeper and her self-pity had grown a little more acute.

In the meantime Dick's portrait progressed favourably, and Dick lunched regularly, after each sitting, with George and Doll. Nor is it cause for wonder that the suspicions with which he set out became less and less easy to be removed, or that his — let us call it his 'sense of duty' to Doll gained more and more upon his natural ambition to live up to those ideas which he had always held sacred. Soon he was certain that Doll and George were not happy together, and it was only the complete lack of encouragement to his hope that he was any more likely than George to make her happy that prevented him from setting to work deliberately to take her away.

At this time Dick's life was as nearly hell as any one need wish to expect on this side of the grave. Imagine it: Two hours alone with George and then two hours with George and Doll, twice a week; hate growing, where

there had been deep affection; desire magnifying itself daily, where honour forbade it so much as to appear; friendly chatter on his lips, and a heart full of treachery and self-scorn, rage and hopeless hope. This was Dick's portion.

In these days George was happier than he had been for months. True, Doll's temper was very uncertain, but that was a thing to which he had begun to resign himself. But to see so much of old Dick was splendid. And to be painting a picture for the love of it alone was splendid also. No patron's tiresome personal taste to consult; no abominable red uniform, no stiff, white, glittering Court outfit to reproduce at so much a square foot. He had been forced, of late, to think enormously about money, and it was to him a sheer delight to be concerned with something which could n't bring him in a penny. He made the most of every minute of the sittings, painting with a sureness and vigour which surprised him. He seemed inspired; and the sensation was uplifting, for latterly he had not seemed to be inspired.

It was well that the portrait should bring pleasure to somebody. Or was it well? I don't know.

(5)

Doll took Dick to see her mother as she had promised. Having just been in his society during a whole lunch and having found him not too entertaining, she had had enough of him for one day, and, making some excuse of a call that must positively be paid, she took herself off without so much as sitting down in the flat. Doll was very glad to be friendly to Sir Richard and give him

lunch when he came and make him at home generally at The Lawn; but her willingness did not extend to boring herself with him for longer than politeness required. He had been very silent and morose on the way down to the flat and she was thankful to be rid of him. Perhaps her mother would be able to make something more of him. She was very welcome to try. Having given Dick a smile and a friendly handshake and having told him to come again soon, she kissed her mother and departed. She had not stayed three minutes in the place. Dick was left alone with Mrs. Brackett. This was not what he had hoped for at all, but it was what he got. Had he not been a well-mannered person, he would have leaped to his feet and departed also; for, just then, a tête-à-tête with Mrs. Brackett was a thing with which he could very easily dispense. But the ordinary usages of decent society made it necessary for him to sit where he was for least at a quarter of an hour. He was bound as with chains.

Mrs. Brackett was very amiable. She liked to be receiving a baronet in her flat. Dick was not the first baronet that she had received, but it seemed possible that he might be the last and she valued him accordingly. She felt upon her the necessity of letting him understand that small flats of three rooms were not what she had been accustomed to.

"This is a poor little place to have you come to, Sir Richard," she said; "but its welcome is warm. I want you to know that. Please smoke. I'm afraid it's a bit early to offer you tea, but if you'd like some I'll make it in a minute. You see, I do without a maid as there's not much room here. I get a woman in each morning

for an hour or two. She does the rough work and the rest *I* undertake. It's a blessing, too. It gives me occupation. I've always been a very busy woman, you know. At home I never had a minute. We entertained a great deal when my husband was alive and, indeed, since then. My dear Doll was so fond of people and I let her see all she wanted. It's so good for a girl to have plenty of society."

She took breath, and Dick, pulling his mustache, observed that it must be. The only feature of this visit which he could regard without detestation was the fact that his hostess seemed prepared to do all the talking.

"Yes," Mrs. Brackett went on, "it's a queer change for me, all this." She waved a deprecating hand. "I dare say you know about my misfortunes."

Dick murmured sympathetically.

"It was a terrible shock," said Mrs. Brackett, "but I hope I have met it bravely." And Dick said that he was sure of it.

"At first," she pursued, "it was as if the world had come to an end." And Dick said that it must have been, while his eyes strayed to the clock.

"Yes," she said, "these things sometimes turn out to be blessings in disguise. Had I not lost all my money, I should almost certainly be in America to-day."

Dick suppressed a sigh, but before he could speak she was talking again.

"And if I were in America I should not be near my child. I should still be in my home over there, my empty, empty home. For you can understand, Sir Richard, that a house which has once contained my Doll cannot seem otherwise than empty when she is out of it. Yes. I

should be leading my old life, treading the Social Mill, going out to the houses of people for whom I care nothing, receiving in my own house people whom I do not want to see. For, I think, Sir Richard, that I don't need to tell you that my girl is my only real interest. While she was with me, a society life was tolerable; it was something that I endured for her sake, as I would endure anything. But now — well — I can assure you that this poor little apartment is infinitely dearer to me than my old luxurious home, simply because it is constantly brightened by her dear presence."

Dick looked at the watch on his wrist (to see, perhaps, if it was at all in advance of the clock) but Mrs. Brackett flowed on.

"And," she said, "I don't think the pleasure is all on my side. Doll and I have always been so much to each other, and though to have the ocean between us could n't mean to Doll what it would to me, — for she is young, Sir Richard, — still, I know that it is nice for her to have her mother near. A girl needs a mother, Sir Richard. No husband can wholly take a mother's place; though I don't say that many of them don't almost succeed. Especially in America. Our men have such a different viewpoint with regard to women from the men of any other nationality."

"I suppose so," said Dick, who knew nothing about it.

"Not that George is not a dear fellow in many ways," said Mrs. Brackett. "I don't need to tell *you* that, Sir Richard. He is full of fine qualities. I believe him to be a first-rate painter and he is certainly advancing in his art all the time. Doll tells me that he is getting wonderful prices for his portraits. But, after all, he is an

Englishman and has an Englishman's attitude towards women. It's not his fault. All his life he has been spoiled and petted by his mother and sister, just like the rest of you. Why, I have seen Hilda bring him his boots — when I was at Brockenhurst with them, you know. Now, no American would *allow* his sister to do that. Of course it seems a small matter to you, but to me it says everything. No Englishman can understand the way our men regard their women-folks. And George is an Englishman. That's why I say that I think Doll is happy in having her mother right here, close to her, where she can find her any minute. George's art, too, takes up a great deal of his time and Doll has necessarily many lonely hours. But *I* am here and she has only to come to *me*. It's a great satisfaction to feel that I can still be of a little use to my girl. Now, if I were in America — ”

Dick was no longer thinking of the time.

“Well,” he said, with a sufficient assumption of carelessness, “Englishmen do seem to manage to make their wives happy sometimes. You see our women don't expect to be worshipped on a pedestal. It's what you expect that makes you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things turn out, is n't it?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Brackett, “that's so, no doubt. *Your* women don't expect anything different. Now, that's just the point. Sir Richard,” she broke off, “may I be very frank with you?” At last she had come to her resolution.

“Of course,” he said.

“Then I will. I want you to see if you can't some way or other just give George a hint that what an English-

woman expects from a husband is n't exactly what an American one does."

The habits of a lifetime asserted themselves.

Dick stiffened. "My dear Mrs. Brackett," he said, "I'm afraid I could n't do anything of the sort. George is my friend, but there's a point beyond which friendship can't go."

He got up. "I must be off," he said.

"No," she cried, "that's just what you must n't do, Sir Richard. I simply can't have you going away with the idea that I could ask you to do such a thing without having good reasons. It would n't be fair to me or to you or to George or to anybody. You've got to hear me out."

"I'd much rather not, Mrs. Brackett."

"Well, you've *got* to, Sir Richard. And it's your duty to your friend. Will you stand by and see him making a shipwreck of his life — yes, and Doll's — and not so much as stretch out a finger to prevent it?"

"Shipwreck?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she cried, "shipwreck! I tell you, as George's friend, that he can't go on as he's doing for very much longer with impunity. He's killing Doll's love for him, and every day that goes by makes it worse. *I've* done my best, God knows, to make him see what he's doing; but you can understand how difficult my position is. I'm the mother-in-law, the proverbial enemy of the married man. The smallest word from me is regarded as jealousy, mischief-making, unwarrantable interference. Oh, you *know* what it is. It's been the stock joke of the comic artists in the Sunday newspapers for a thousand years. Don't you see that *I* can do nothing? And if I

were to speak to Hilda or George's mother it would be the same. Oh, I can see those two cold Englishwomen looking at me. Just looking at me. But you, Sir Richard, *you* are George's friend. There can be no question of jealousy or mischief-making where you're concerned. Can't you, won't you, suggest to George that he would do well to consider what he's about? Doll is n't unreasonable. She only asks to be loved. But do you think it's a good way for a man to show his love, to deny his wife the smallest, most innocent pleasure, to grudge her every penny that she wants for dress and all the little things that a woman needs. There, now I've said it! Yes, George is mean. Mean, Sir Richard. And it's growing on him. Economy's all very well in its way, but George carries it a great deal too far. Why should n't Doll have her automobile? Why should she spend her whole summer stewing in London? Why must she never go to the theatre or buy a bottle of perfume, if she cares about doing it? It is n't as if George was n't making money. He is. He's doing splendidly. And he grudges her a cab-fare into London. Do you think Doll married to be starved of all her pleasures? Do you think she'll go on like that? Do you?"

This outburst, as remarkable for its vehemence as for both its exaggerations and suppressions, concluded with a small bout of tears.

Dick waited until the tragic little woman had calmed herself, and then he held out his hand. "I'm very sorry," he said, "but, of course, I can do nothing." Then he took up his hat and left her.

The Code seemed sheer trumpery to him.

CHAPTER XII

(1)

A DAY or two later Mrs. Brackett was at The Lawn, taking tea with Doll. Hilda came in, stayed a little time, and went away. Her chief desire just then was to win Doll's friendship, because she had been made very anxious by that unfortunate meeting which had taken place in her drawing-room and she felt it her duty to keep an eye upon her sister-in-law. But having divined the hostility of Mrs. Brackett to George, she had come most cordially to dislike her and she realised perfectly the hopelessness of making any progress towards winning Doll's confidence so long as Doll's mother should be present. As she saw no reason to suffer useless irritation, she cut her visit as short as politeness allowed. George, who had come into the drawing-room to see his sister, accompanied her out of the house and stood for a few minutes chatting with her before she drove away in her motor-car. Being still on outwardly good terms with Mrs. Brackett, he returned to the drawing-room to make a pretence of finishing his tea instead of going directly to the studio which he would have done if he had consulted his own inclination.

He found his wife and her mother at the window. Doll was crying and Mrs. Brackett was comforting her. It always maddened him to see Mrs. Brackett comforting Doll. That was his own business. He said nothing, however, because he suspected — and he was right — that

these tears had been caused by the spectacle of Hilda driving away in that very handsome motor-car of hers.

He took up his half-empty cup of tea, drank it off at a gulp, and turned to leave the room. Mrs. Brackett suddenly darted to the door, spread her arms, and cried, "No, George."

She had never been quite so dramatic as this, and he would have been amused if he could. He tried hard. He succeeded in producing a smile of a kind and asked courteously, "What's the matter now, Mrs. Brackett?"

He had not called her 'mommer' for some time.

"The matter!" Mrs. Brackett repeated. "You know very well what's the matter, George."

He sat on the first chair that he found. "No," he said coldly, "I don't. Suppose you tell me. And you can come away from that door. I won't bolt."

Doll, by the window, sobbed afresh, and his heart swelled with rage at the woman who had brought all this misery upon them.

Mrs. Brackett came slowly into the room. She did not sit down, but stood behind a chair, turning its back towards her and placing her hands on the top of it. The effect was rather as if she were in a pulpit.

"George," she began, "the time has come when I've got to speak out. After all, I'm Doll's mother and I have a right to say what I'm going to say. I'll just ask you one question. When are you going to buy a car for Doll?"

George had lit a cigarette. This is one of man's few advantages when holding discussion with a woman of Mrs. Brackett's respectability.

"Since, I suppose," he said deliberately, "that Hilda's car is the cause of all this," — he turned his head slightly

towards Doll, — “I may remind you, Mrs. Brackett, that Hilda’s husband is a wealthy man and that I’m not. I may inform you that I’m going to buy a car for Doll when I can afford it and not before. Is that sufficiently clear? Because, if not, I’m afraid I can’t make it any clearer. The actual date when I can do what you want depends on so many things; on the amount of money I make, no less than on the amount of money we can save.”

“Oh!” said Mrs. Brackett with a snort, “we’ve heard that word before. Save! Save! Do you think of anything but saving? It’s miserly!”

“Just as you please,” said George. “If you consider that common prudence is avarice I’ve nothing to say. Your point of view and mine are so different that I can’t expect you to form the same estimate of my conduct that I do. But I’m afraid that I must ask you to let me be the judge of its wisdom. You may rest assured, however, that Doll shall have her motor-car at the very first possible moment. My only wish is to buy one for her, because, though at one time I hoped for happiness, my ambition is now fixed a little lower. Peace is what I’m after *now*, Mrs. Brackett; and if it has to be bought — well, I’ll buy as much of it as I can. But Doll’s welfare is my care and I won’t risk it to give her the empty pleasure of owning a motor-car that’s a little newer and larger than Hilda’s.”

“Risk!” cried Mrs. Brackett. “Why, it’s funny to hear you, George! Where’s the risk? You talk as if you were unknown. But you’re getting better prices all the time and you’ve all the commissions you can deal with.”

“More,” said George.

“More? What do you mean?”

“What I say. I can’t deal with all the work that’s

offered me." He said this with some hazy idea of bringing this scene to an end. If Mrs. Brackett thought that he was making money very rapidly and would soon be in a position to indulge Doll to the full, perhaps she would break off this abominable wrangle. He was at once undeceived.

"You mean," Mrs. Brackett almost screamed, "that you've refused work?"

"Yes," said George. "I refused an offer this morning and another the day before yesterday."

Mrs. Brackett came suddenly from behind her chair and planted herself squarely in front of him.

"And why?" she demanded.

"Because," said George, "both of those portraits were for presentation and they were wanted quickly, and I can't do more than so many portraits this winter. And when they're done I'm going to do landscape and have a holiday. I shall need one too."

"You can't do more than how many?"

"It really does n't matter, Mrs. Brackett. But does n't it occur to you that there's a limit to the good work that a man can do in a given time?"

"Good work!" she exclaimed scornfully. "You've got your *name*, have n't you? Do you fancy the people that buy your pictures'll know what the work's like, so long as you make them look prettier than they are and put all their jewels in? Who cares if you do good work or not?"

"Well," said George slowly, "I do, for one."

"Oh, you do, do you?"

"Yes," said George doggedly. "I do. My work —"

"Work!" she cried; "you don't know what work is. You're afraid of work."

"I was going to say," said George deliberately, "that my work is about the one thing that I think I'm likely to have, if things go on as they're doing, and I value it accordingly. I don't mean to lose everything."

"Your work!" she exclaimed scornfully. "You should think of your wife."

"Perhaps," he said, "I think of her more than you imagine. It would be a poor way to care for Doll's future if I did bad work so that she might have a motor-car a little sooner than she will. I should think common sense, if not that mother's love that you're always boasting about, would tell you so much. I don't mean to paint pot-boilers, Mrs. Brackett. I might make a few thousand pounds extra now, but if I lost my reputation for honesty that would n't do us much good later on, would it?"

"Oh, your honesty!"

This trick which she had of repeating words succeeded at last in making him lose his temper.

"It's futile to discuss this," he said. "You can't understand. And how should you? Money is your god." This was a frightful thing to say to Mrs. Brackett, who believed herself to be a thoroughly religious woman. She stood gasping at him for a moment. Then she found words again.

"Oh!" she said, "please don't take that tone of superiority with me. It's not for you to sneer at a mother's love, George March. And it's not for you to talk about honesty and good work. If you were doing even as much as your utter laziness will let you to earn money to keep your wife in comfort, there might be something to be said for you. But you're not. On the plea that you must only do your best work, you turn down two good com-

missions. And why have n't you time to paint these pictures? Because, for your own pleasure, you spend half your days painting pictures of ugly old men in fur robes. You may sell them or you may not; but what I say is, that it's simply wicked for a man in your position to give up certainties like those two commissions and waste his time over things that will probably never bring in a penny. Why, the very cost of those canvases — ”

“Oh,” drawled George, “I can use the canvases again, you know.”

“And that's not all,” she stormed on. “What about this portrait of Sir Richard Crewe that you're painting? Do you ask me to believe that you're consulting my girl's happiness when you're engaged on that? I should say not! No, it amuses you to do it and you get a few hours' talk with your friend. It's mere selfishness. You'd rather — ”

“I'd rather not talk any more about it, Mrs. Brackett,” he said, getting up suddenly.

“But you shall,” she cried, “you shall. If Doll won't look after herself, I must do it for her, and I tell you, George March — ”

“Stop!” he said harshly, as he struck his hand on a table beside which he stood. “Don't tell me anything more. There's a limit to my patience, Mrs. Brackett.”

“Doll,” she screamed. “Will you allow him to speak to me like this?”

But Doll only wept afresh. She was incapable of stemming this torrent of trouble.

“Perhaps, after all,” said George, “we'd better finish this, now we've begun it. It'll, at any rate, clear the air, and we'll know where we are. I fancy I've been patient

long enough. No!" he cried, for Mrs. Brackett seemed about to speak. "You've said your say and now you shall hear what I think about things. Silence, I say." He spoke so savagely that Mrs. Brackett was actually cowed. Dumb and with startled eyes, she watched him take two turns between the door and the table. At last he came to a halt in front of her and, pointing a finger at her, began to speak.

"I accuse you," he said, "of being the sole cause of all the trouble in this house. I accuse you of having deliberately set to work to kill Doll's love for me. I accuse you of wicked jealousy, insane meddling, and wilful blindness to the facts of our situation. Before you came here Doll loved me; now she almost detests me, I believe. Before you came here she was perfectly sensible about the economies which I judge it wise to practise. She may have been a little thoughtless and spent a little money foolishly now and then; but that was nothing. She may not have understood our position altogether, and she may have wanted me to sell our investments; but she would have come round to my way of thinking in a very little time. I know Doll. Thanks to you and your precious American system, she's as ignorant of money as a child. I don't blame her for wanting to have a good time. I don't blame her for wanting to sell our investments. It was perfectly natural. It was the way any child would look at the matter. If a child wants a thing that it can't have, it's natural for it to be angry and sulk; but if it's treated wisely, it can be persuaded easily enough. If it loves the person who denies it its desires, it soon comes round. And Doll would have come round — for she loved me not so very long ago — if she had been let alone. I

say, if she had been let alone. But she was n't. I ought n't to need to tell *you*, Mrs. Brackett, what influence was at work all day long against mine. But that we may have this matter perfectly clear, I'll tell you. It was yours. Since you came to England you've never lost a chance to stir Doll up to harass me in my attempts to get our affairs into something like order. Openly and in secret you've incited her perpetually to every kind of extravagance, to every kind of demand for money from me. You've lived in our house and eaten our bread and all the time you've been doing your utmost to ruin our happiness. And, by God! you've succeeded. Well, do you know what I call your conduct, Mrs. Brackett? I call it treachery. Don't imagine that I'm surprised that you hate me. I took Doll from you and that was quite enough. Don't think that what you've done to me astonishes me very much. But that you should give yourself up to this dirty business in the name of your love for Doll does surprise me. Don't you understand, *won't* you understand, that Doll was happy with me until you came? And look at her now, poor thing"—he pointed to his wife where she sat red-eyed and demoralised by the window. "That's what you've done, Mrs. Brackett. That's what your mother's love, which I prefer to call sheer, wicked, mad jealousy, has managed to accomplish. And now that the noble work is fulfilled, now that you've done your worst and made my house a hell, let me do what I ought to have done long ago and inform you that you will not be allowed inside my front door again. Doll, unfortunately, I can't prevent from going to see you, though, if she has any care for her own happiness and mine, I would advise her to avoid you like the plague; but I refuse to

countenance your dangerous and malignant presence here."

He turned from her and was going out of the room when Doll's voice brought him to a halt.

"George!" she cried.

He swung round at once. That note was not to be disregarded.

"Well?" he asked.

Doll was on her feet and already halfway to him from her window. Two more steps and she had come to where Mrs. Brackett stood. Here she stopped and put an arm round her mother's small body.

"You coward!" she said. "You coward, to talk to any woman like that! And to my mother! Oh!" Anger choked her.

She had passed in a moment from the condition of helpless, tear-stained misery, in which she had been plunged by this quarrel of the only two protectors that she had ever known, to one of simple exaltation. She seemed transfigured. Passion dilated all her splendid body. The rôles of mother and child were all reversed. A sort of avenging goddess stood there, shielding with her strong arm a little shrunken figure in black. Mrs. Brackett's eyes were closed; she leaned hard against her daughter, cowering into the shelter so unexpectedly provided. For George's words had struck home, and for an instant, stunned by the conviction that inspired the man whom she had injured, she had seen herself with his vision as the destroyer of her child's happiness. To recover her poise a little time was necessary to her. She threw an arm across Doll and upwards, and caught the girl's shoulder and clung, burying her face against the broad bosom. Her

instinct was impeccable. By no action of hers could Doll have been more powerfully affected. To feel this mother of hers, to whom nearly all her life she had looked first for love and help and comfort, clinging to her at last with this silent, terrified appeal, was something very strange but very glorious. She, the protected, had suddenly become the protectress. By the measure of her former helplessness did she now seem competent; of her former timidity, valiant; of her former supineness, resolute. It was as if her physical exuberance had been suddenly extended to embrace her mind. Her mother was attacked and frightened. But let her mother be of good cheer. Help was at hand.

"I am sorry," said George while his wife stood struggling for voice. "I am very sorry to have to speak to any woman like that; more particularly to your mother. But when I say I'm sorry, I don't mean that I apologise. These things had to be said, Doll. They had to be said. They're true, and if you don't know it, your mother does."

He turned again and again went to the door. As no word recalled him he left the room and, a moment later, the house. The open air and rapid movement were necessary to him.

(2)

For a few seconds the two women preserved strictly the attitude in which George had left them; a perception of what this quarrel meant kept their minds so busy that their muscles were robbed of the power of movement. The sound of the front door closing put a

period to their immobility. Doll swiftly disengaged herself from her mother's clutch, went over to the window and said, "He's gone out." Her voice was steady and as hard as a stone.

Mrs. Brackett had sat down on the sofa. Her breath came short through her nostrils and the rouge was vivid on her white face. Mechanically her hands occupied themselves with adjusting her hair.

Doll came back to her and laid a hand on her shoulder. "He's gone out," she said again.

Mrs. Brackett sprang to her feet and enveloped the girl in a sudden, fervent embrace. "Oh! my poor darling!" she cried. "Oh, my lamb. Oh, my poor, lovely Doll!"

Doll undid her clasp and shook herself free. The strange look that was in her eyes deterred Mrs. Brackett from attempting further consolation.

"Do you understand, mother?" said Doll. "He's gone out! After saying what he did, he's gone out. I said he was a coward."

"Oh, no, Doll," cried her mother. "You must n't. You must n't. It's not *right* to say such things. He's your husband, Doll." — A most curious instance, this, of the power of The Conventions.

Doll said nothing, but her large eyes turned a little wonderingly upon her mother.

Suddenly panic laid hold of Mrs. Brackett.

"Doll," she cried, "don't look at me like that. Don't do it! You're not to think any more about this. You're not to."

Doll gave a little laugh. "Oh, mother!" she said. "Don't be foolish."

"He did n't mean what he said," Mrs. Brackett went on hurriedly. "I know he did n't. He spoke in anger. He said far more than he really thought. I ought n't to have spoken as I did. And I would n't have, only he made me so mad, standing there justifying himself. And it was of you I was thinking all the time. You believe that, Doll? My girl's happiness is all *I* care about. And, Doll, this was bound to come. George has never liked me, never. I was foolish to stay on in England. I ought to have gone away. Then he'd have had you all to himself and his jealous spirit would n't have had any cause to show itself. I'll go away now. I can let my apartment, and then I'll take the first steamer back to America and you'll be able to settle down with George comfortably again. Perhaps what I've said may make him act a little better towards you now, and if so I'll willingly give up the idea of living beside you. But you must n't, you *must n't* think any more about this. You're married to him and your only chance of happiness lies *with* him, Doll. When I'm gone I expect he'll be quite different to you. So let me go away now, and when he comes home you can tell him that he won't be plagued with me any more. Tell him that I'm leaving England as soon as possible. I can bear it all right, Doll, if you'll come over and see me sometimes in America. For your sake, Doll. I guess George won't grudge you to me for a month or so every now and then, Doll."

"Hush, mother," said Doll at this point. "I'm thinking." She spoke softly, but with complete determination.

Mrs. Brackett was silent and sat for some minutes, quite still, save that her fingers plucked nervously at the corner of her handkerchief. Her last speech had been

the result of a fear which had come upon her. Hitherto her love for her child had blinded her to the possible consequences of her conduct; but now her eyes were suddenly opened to what might happen and she was terrified, as people often are who find themselves reaping more than they have meant to sow. Yet, while she trembled at what Doll might do, she was conscious of a great hope.

"Mother," said Doll at last, "you can never come here again. After what he said, it's impossible."

"Oh, Doll!" cried Mrs. Brackett, "don't say that. It's not as bad as it seems. He did n't mean —"

"Yes," said Doll, "he did. He *did*."

"Well —" began her mother.

But Doll stilled her with a gesture.

"No," she said, "it's over. You can't come here any more. He's shut this house to you. And if he shuts it to you, he shuts it to me."

"Oh, Doll!" Mrs. Brackett's voice exhibited a strange blend of protest and triumph. "Oh, Doll!" she repeated.

"I'm going to pack a trunk," said Doll, getting up. "And I'm coming home with you. I won't stay here. I won't live with a man who thinks about you as he does."

"Doll!" Mrs. Brackett pleaded. "Don't even imagine it. What'll people say?"

"See here, mother," said Doll. "This is a thing that I've got to settle myself. You can't do it for me. I've got to do it, and I've got to do it now. It's not a thing that can be put off and thought about and argued about and done in a week or a month, perhaps. George has killed my love for him. It's dead, mother. I could have stood his meanness to me, because I believed that he thought he was acting for my good, as I've often told

you. But when he gets mean to you, when he deliberately tells you that you've been working to make mischief between him and me, when he tries to throw on *you* the blame for all the trouble there's been between us, when you and I both know that it's all his own fault — well, it's too much. As if you could do such a thing! Why, don't I know that you love me better than all the world and am I going to believe that you'd try to hurt me in that horrible way? No. I see George properly now. He's a small-spirited man. He's stingy with his money and he hates you because I love you. He's jealous and he hates you. I saw it in his face; I heard it in his voice. He does n't care whether I'm happy or not, so long as he keeps hold of his money; and he won't have any one else even trying to make me happy. And when they do try, well, he turns on them and accuses them of all sorts of awful wickedness. And now I despise him. He's said things to you that I'll never forgive: never, never, never! Well, he can keep his money. I don't want it. I'd rather beg than touch another cent of it. And so I'm coming to you. George'll find that I don't hesitate between my mother and the man who thinks so badly of her. And as for what people will say, do you suppose *I* care? Let them say what they please. I guess they can't say anything bad enough but what I'd deserve it if I went on living with a man that I don't love, a man that I despise and hate as I do George. So come right upstairs, mother, and help me fill a trunk, and then he'll find his old house clear of us when he gets back. Oh, my God!" cried the poor thing, "I'm glad it's happened at last. It's not been gay here lately, mother. It's not been the least little bit gay."

CHAPTER XIII

(1)

THE transfer to Mrs. Brackett's flat of Doll and the few effects which she took with her was performed without interruption. George remained abroad and the two women had much more than all the time that they needed for their extremely rapid preparations. A small trunk was filled with certain indispensable things. Doll took nothing but these; all her remaining jewellery was left behind. George had given it to her. Doll hurried on a hat and coat, a cab was called, and, to the amazement of the servants, their mistress and her mother went away in it, leaving behind them a letter addressed to George.

Mother-love had triumphed!

Doll gave the driver his direction in a steady, confident voice, told her mother to jump in, followed her without haste, and closed the door emphatically. Now, all dealings with cabmen, porters, and the like had hitherto been in Mrs. Brackett's department; hitherto Doll had always climbed first into cabs; hitherto it had been Mrs. Brackett who had shut their doors.

Doll's tears seemed all dried up now. Her sweet mouth was resolutely set, and her eyes were bright with determination. She gave no sign that she was aware of the presence of the housemaid and the parlourmaid on the steps. She did not even glance at the house she was leaving. But as they drove away a great sigh of relief escaped her.

It marked the successful accomplishment of the first real action of her life; the discovery that she was capable of carrying through something truly momentous.

"That's done!" she said.

"Doll—" Mrs. Brackett began, a little wildly.

"Hush, mother!" said the girl. "Hush!" And Mrs. Brackett subsided into her corner, as the cab gathered way.

Not another word was spoken till they came to Mrs. Brackett's flat. Here Doll caused her trunk to be carried upstairs and settled with the cabman while Mrs. Brackett stood about doing nothing at all. It seemed to this dominating mother that, all in a minute, she had fallen definitely into the subordinate place. It was not so, of course. Complete self-reliance cannot be born all in a minute. Doll's long-smouldering and carefully fed discontent with George had suddenly blazed up into a hot anger which had driven her to her resolve and had supported her wonderfully through her packing and departure; but this ecstasy of indignation only masqueraded as resolve. She was like a fire-balloon which climbs and sails only so long as the flame burns brightly to fill it with the hot air it needs. And now her wick was out. She had done what she had set out to do; she had left George; she had come to her mother's flat; she had been big and brave; she had soared and voyaged; she had surprised herself and her mother and George and everybody. And now that her deed was done and, with the inevitable decline of her anger from its white heat, the realisation of what she had done began to come upon her, the problem of her future forced itself upon her attention. At once she leaned upon her mother.

The cabman had hardly shut the door of the flat after him when, pathetically, her face underwent a sudden change from extreme determination to something very like alarm. Her mouth drooped, her eyes became dim, her voice agitated. She took the best chair and said, "Mother, what am I to do now?"

Anybody but Mrs. Brackett would have put her head out of the window and called to the cabman to come and fetch the trunk down again. I think Mrs. Brackett would have done it if she had not just passed through the soul-shaking experience of finding her authority set at naught, her advice rejected, and, lastly, her practical assistance not required. That Doll should have hustled her into the cab and given the driver his orders affected her mother much more than that the girl should have refused to listen to her half-hearted advocacy of George. Doll had often been difficult; but she had never before paid the cab.

And so, just as the evaporation of Doll's self-reliance resulted in an instant return to dependence, so the recovery by Mrs. Brackett of the upper hand was accompanied by an irresistible temptation to maintain it. To send Doll back to George was what Mrs. Brackett would have liked very much to do, because she was really alarmed at the prospect of the scandal and financial difficulties which this flight opened up; but to do so would be, perhaps, to renounce forever the precious supremacy which she had suddenly lost and now had unexpectedly regained. Mrs. Brackett would not have been Mrs. Brackett if she had foregone her advantage.

"Why, Doll," she said cheerfully, "I'll tell you what you've got to do. You've got to take your things off

and lie right down in my bed and take a tablet and go to sleep. Now I've got my girl back again, I mean to look after her well. And while you're resting I'll get some food for our dinner. I've not done much cooking since I married your father, but I was pretty good at it as a girl and I've been trying my hand again in this apartment. I'll fix you up a piece of steak and a grape-fruit salad and some French fried potatoes in no time. So let me see you safe in bed and on the way to Nod Land and then I'll be able to get started."

Doll's protest was not a strong one.

"Oh, mother," she said, "it does n't seem right for you to be doing all that while I lie in bed. Let me help. I've got to help now, you know."

"Not *now*," said Mrs. Brackett as she armed herself with a string bag. "Later on, we'll see; but this is *my* birthday and you're to do as you're told, my poor darling. So here's your tablet. Take it like a good girl, and here's your glass of water."

Doll obeyed, swallowed the drug, sighed deeply, and got up. She stretched and yawned, for she was in truth desperately tired.

"Well," she said, "just for this once; but not again. If I'm to" — she hesitated — "to live with you now, mother, I must learn —"

"Lamb," said Mrs. Brackett, "go to your bed."

(2)

Tacitly all talk about their situation was ruled out of their conversation for the rest of that day. Neither of them felt able to approach the question of the future.

Whether two hundred pounds a year is a large or a small income depends upon the person who enjoys it. Many people would regard it as a fortune; Mrs. Brackett thought it a miserable pittance. She believed herself capable of maintaining her existence upon it, but that was all. And now a large and healthy girl must be maintained as well. It says a great deal for Mrs. Brackett's courage (or should I say ignorance?) that she faced her future without dismay. At once she had resolved to live almost entirely on nuts. For Doll she would have starved gladly to death, and in comparison with starvation a diet of nuts is luxury. Doll must have all their meat, of course. And, in the matter of clothes, as Mrs. Brackett reminded herself with real satisfaction, a widow has few needs. Nuts and a small wardrobe! — that was her scheme of life. It had to be done and it was going to be done. Her principal anxiety arose from the circumstance that her apartment was situated so close to The Lawn. That was awkward. Of course they must move as soon as possible to some remoter district; no doubt it could be managed. But though she thought these things she said nothing of them to Doll; this was not the moment for talking about possible difficulties.

As for Doll she was no more anxious than her mother to bring their future under discussion. Her spurt of self-assertion had exhausted itself by its own violence, and now she reposed confidently on the supposition that her mother would see to everything as she had always done. To be sure she was aware of the extent of Mrs. Brackett's income, but to Doll two hundred pounds was very much the same as two thousand. The habit of leaving the direction of her affairs to some one else was too deeply

ingrained for her to lose it readily. Since her marriage she had learned how disagreeable it was perpetually to consider how money may be spent to the best advantage, and now that she was back again under her mother's wing she was in no hurry to resume that practice. She supposed, however, that they might have to be rather careful.

So she dismissed from her mind all thought of her and her mother's future and concentrated all her faculties upon the task of proving to herself that she had acted heroically and beautifully in leaving her husband, and stirring the embers of her passion against George by brooding over as many instances of his harshness, want of sympathy, tyranny, avarice, and other shocking qualities as her memory would furnish to her resentment.

The tablet, finding a rather exhausted subject for its activities, gave her two hours of sound, refreshing sleep, and she woke to find her mother grilling the steak in the kitchen. In the dining-room the table was already laid, with the grape-fruit salad, a plate of cakes, and a dish of filberts and walnuts.

"Why, mother," she said, as she rubbed her eyes and smoothed back her hair, "you ought to have let me help get some of this ready. You really ought."

But Mrs. Brackett only crowed a little laugh and turned the steak over. How it sizzled and how appetizing it smelt! Doll found that she was very hungry.

They sat down to dinner and were desperately cheerful. They talked busily about clothes and cooking and Mrs. Brackett's charwoman, and resolutely avoided all reference to what had happened and what was going to happen. Their unexpressed design was to postpone

the discussion of anything serious until the morrow, and, if they had been left to themselves, I dare say they would have succeeded, for they were both very clever at avoiding unpleasantness. But they were not left to themselves.

Mrs. Brackett was boiling the coffee and Doll was setting out the cups — she had insisted on doing this — when the doorbell rang. Mrs. Brackett, opening, discovered Otis Gardner upon her threshold.

“Why, Otis!” she cried. “If this is n’t a surprise!” Her voice, however, declared plainly that the surprise was not a happy one. Indeed, the reason for this extraordinary visit was sufficiently obvious.

Otis came in without a word, hung up his hat, bowed Mrs. Brackett into the sitting-room, followed her, and shut the door after him.

“Doll,” he said pleasantly, “I’ve come to take you home.”

(3)

Otis was a sagacious young man and he had not approached this task in any spirit of light-hearted confidence. He fully appreciated his difficulties. Doll could not possibly have done what she had without believing herself thoroughly justified. He had seen the letter to George which she had left behind her and he knew that she burned with resentment against her husband for his treatment of her mother. George had confessed that he had spoken to Mrs. Brackett in a perfectly unmistakable way and had given him his reasons for so doing. In the face of this admitted quarrel, which George abso-

lutely declined to accommodate, — “She must choose between her mother and me,” he had said. “One or the other. Life’s impossible for us on any terms but that,” — in the face, I say, of this quarrel there seemed in the judgment of the ambassador but one line that could be taken with any prospect of success and that was the firm line. To plead with Doll would be sheer folly. George’s and her sole chance of happiness together depended on an absolute refusal to compromise with the enemy. Mrs. Brackett must be routed, not placated; Doll must be commanded, not implored. But while he was certain that only the strong line could succeed, he was by no means confident that it would. His voice, however, when he addressed Doll showed no lack of confidence.

Doll, who had been given, by her mother’s exclamation, about half a minute in which to prepare herself, now lay on the sofa in one of her admirable attitudes reading a magazine by the light of a pink-shaded lamp. Her heart beat strongly, but no one would have supposed it; she looked so entirely at her ease. She had even managed to pull a rug over her feet. Perhaps for the first time in her life she was consciously posing, but we must admit that her situation called upon all her resources and our crises often develop weapons our possession of which we have never suspected.

As Otis spoke, she lowered her magazine deliberately and looked at him over the top of it. She said nothing. Mrs. Brackett, also silent, stood, a little on one side, but between them; she was pulling herself together.

“I’ve just come from George,” Otis continued. “He telephoned for me about an hour ago. Of course he can’t come himself.”

Mrs. Brackett made a little scornful sound. Doll still said nothing, but she laid her magazine on her knees.

"If you persist in this, Doll," Otis went on, "you'll be liable to be sorry. I tell you that, without any hesitation whatever. You're leaving a man that loves you much better than you deserve for a mother that loves you much less than either you or she thinks. I'm right on George's side in this and both of you had better know it at once. And I tell you, Doll, that if your mother had loved you truly she'd never have let this happen. The very first moment she began to feel that she and George did n't hit it off, she'd have booked her passage for America. She'd have sacrificed herself for you and made up her mind that her influence had come to an end when you married. She'd have acknowledged that she'd got to take second place now. She'd have left you and George to shake down without any of her assistance. She'd have realised that George was doing his level best to get his finances straight and that it was your business to help him and hers not to hinder him. But she stayed on and she stirred you up, day after day. She criticised George to you before his face and God knows how much poison she managed to inject into you behind his back. She mistook her own stupid jealousy for love, and meddling for the championship of your cause. And now it's come to this. Between you, you've driven George desperate. Every day he saw things going worse and worse, and every day it was clearer to him who was to blame. He does n't blame you, Doll. He knows you're all right, if you're let alone. He had none of this trouble until your mother came to England. You were perfectly reasonable. You gave up your car with hardly a pout. He

hated to have to ask you to do it, but he's told me that when you took it as you did he was almost glad that he'd been forced to ask you, because then he knew that you were all right and that things were going to work out satisfactorily. And there was your selling your jewels for your mother. He was so proud of you for that. Those were your first big tests and you came out finely. Well, ever since your mother arrived it's been nothing but car, car, car; and not only car. A thousand other things to spend money on. Why, George tells me that he can't believe you're the same girl that was so eager to help him save money and make you both all comfortable again. He says that when he remembers how happy you and he were together, until you fetched your mother from the other side, and thinks how miserable everything's been since, it seems as if some one else had come back from there in your place. Now, I want you just to think if all that is n't true and to ask yourself who's responsible. What's the new factor in the situation? Is n't it your mother? Don't think I mean that she does n't love you. She adores you, of course. But her love's selfish. You're a part of herself that she can't give up. You're her Doll That Came Alive, as I've often heard her tell. She looks on you as her property, and she hates George for taking you from her. George does n't love you that way. If he won't buy you a car, it's not because he does n't care whether you have what you want or not. It's not because he's stingy, as you and your mother have told him. It's because he looks ahead and thinks it more sensible to clear off his debts quick and not risk your and his future by selling his investments and painting lots of bad pictures. He only

wants to spoil you and pet you and make you happy; and the sooner he can get his bills paid, the sooner that'll happen. But you won't help him, at least your mother won't let you. You're just a spoilt baby, Doll, and you don't seem fit to be a wife. By Jove, while you let your mother boss you, you're a Doll that *has n't* come alive.

"And now, which is it to be? George or your mother? After this afternoon, it can't be both. George won't have it. He's tried it, and it's failed. Your mother won't have it, and she's never tried. You don't tell me that you're going to hesitate, now I've told you all this. It's not George that's speaking; it's I. I'm not a party to this transaction. I'm a looker-on. I've no prejudice one way or the other. I dare say you think I've no right to come here and do what I'm doing. That's as may be. But I've, at any rate, the right of an old friend of yours, Doll, who can't bear to see you smashing up your whole life. And that's what you're going to do, if you stick to this crazy plan of yours. This is *n't* a thing that can blow over or be made up. It's red war between your husband and your mother, and you're the prize. So now you know all about it. You know just where you are. George is *n't* the man to do any more if you reject him now. He'll take your answer all right. You won't be plagued. Your mother shall have you all to herself from now on. So just think it well over, and then I'm sure you'll put on your hat and come back with me to George. I've got the car right here. But if you won't, I'm authorised to tell you that George does *n't* mean that you shall suffer by it. He'll pay five hundred a year into your account at any banker's that you care to name. And that's all, Doll."

Having concluded his address he walked to the mantelpiece, leaned his back against it, and waited. He had said his say.

"Well, Otis Gardner," began Mrs. Brackett tempestuously, "if I'd ever have believed —"

"Mother," said Doll from the sofa, "I'm going to bed." She rose, showed Otis all her pretty teeth in an elaborate yawn, and left the room.

(4)

Otis had received his answer.

He lightly shrugged his shoulders and mechanically took a cigarette from his case.

"Well," he said with a smile, "that's *that*, Mrs. Brackett."

Mrs. Brackett advanced upon him and halted just in front of him.

"If I had n't heard you with my own ears," she said savagely, "I would n't have believed it. You're just a common traitor, Otis Gardner. To think of all the years I've known you and been good to you, and that you should turn on me like this in the end! It's unbelievable. Oh! how I despise you!"

"I'm not sure," said Otis amiably, "that I don't despise myself. I ought to have made something better of such a very good case. I guess I'm not a diplomat, Mrs. Brackett. I'll go. I've stayed too long as it is."

"Yes," she said, "I guess you'd better, Otis. You'll do no good here, and I think you know it."

"Oh, I know it," he said as he began to move towards the door.

She watched him silently, venomously, breathing hard through distended nostrils.

At the door he paused and turned to her again.

"Mrs. Brackett," he said, "you've been very good to me very often and I hate to leave you like this. I don't expect you to forgive me, but I've got to ask it. In this trouble I can't help being against you, because there's no way for me not to take sides. I want to see Doll happy and I don't think you're going the right way to work to secure that end; and I've got to tell you so. But please believe that I'm ever so sorry for you. I can understand how you look at George. You think he's mean and tyrannous. I don't agree with you, but I can see your point of view. Doll's all in all to you. You'd give your life for her gladly and any one that does n't seem ready to humour her smallest wish looks to you like a sort of monster. Perhaps I can see things more clearly than you do because I'm not Doll's mother. I suppose no mother can see quite clearly about her child. Won't you think this all over again? Is n't it any use trying to make one more appeal to you — for Doll's sake? George can make her happy if you'll give him a chance. Won't you let him try?"

Mrs. Brackett laughed angrily.

"He's had his chance," she said, "and he's made her miserable. That's enough for me. I'm through with George March. And I'm through with you, Otis Gardner. And I'll be thankful to you if you'll go away without saying any more. Of course, I can't make you go, and if you choose to stay I must put up with it. But I always thought you pretended to be an American gentleman."

He smiled in spite of himself.

"And so," he said, holding his ground, for he was very much in earnest, "you think you can make Doll happy?"

"I can only do my best," she said. "I can, at any rate, give her shelter and love and try to make up to her for my folly in ever letting her marry that man. I can't give her one half — no, not one hundredth — of what I used to. But do you think she'll care? And as for accepting anything from George March, as you proposed just now, I don't need to ask her before I refuse an offer which is nothing but an added insult. What I have will be hers and its deficiencies will be more than made up for by my love."

"I wonder," said Otis. "I'm afraid Doll's spoilt. She must have her little comforts. And you know it, Mrs. Brackett. No doubt you'll do your best, but — and God knows I'm sorry for it — you won't be able to make her very comfortable. Don't think I'm throwing it in your teeth that you're not as rich as you were once. But it's the fact, Mrs. Brackett. For a time Doll will try to pretend that she's happy with you in this little apartment of yours; but sooner or later she'll miss all the things she's been accustomed to. I know Doll. And you know that what I say is true. Do you really think that you're doing the best you can for Doll in bringing her here?"

"Yes," she said stubbornly, "I do. I know it. I know it. My love will make up to her for everything."

His eyes hardened at that and his voice became cold. He knew now that his pleading was no use.

"I tell you," he cried, "that she'll be wretched and you can love her all you know and she'll still be wretched. Doll's not constructed to face hard times and she'll just wilt on your hands. Oh! you're doing very well by her,

are n't you? But so long as you have her all to yourself you won't care. You'll have your doll again, though I guess you won't be able to dress it up quite so beautifully as you did. But I've said all I've got to say. I'll leave you in possession now. After this it's just you and Doll, just Doll and you. For of course she'll never see a soul but you. The only people she knows in London she won't care to ask out here and she won't be able to dress well enough to visit them, you see. But Doll won't mind, bless you! She'll have her mother and that's all she needs. She'll never know a moment of dulness."

He was very angry!

Mrs. Brackett drew herself up to the full extent of her inconsiderable height. This suggestion that she and Doll were likely to go short in the matter of society was intolerable.

"You seem to think," she said, "that Doll's acquaintance depends on George March. I may tell you that Doll knows a great many delightful people in London. She has her club. There are dozens of most attractive American women that she knows there. And my friend, Sir Richard Crewe —"

Perhaps, having regard to the end of things, Otis was mistaken in saying that he had stayed too long. If he had gone away before this, certain events might not have taken place and a different conclusion might have been reached. But, in the light of what now happened and what it directly led to, it is almost certain that poor Doll would have been spared some very wretched experiences if, at the particular moment, Otis had been in his car instead of in Mrs. Brackett's flat.

"Ah!" said Otis, "Crewe!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Brackett triumphantly. "Yes." She supposed that Otis was now in the dust.

"See here, Mrs. Brackett," said Otis as he tapped the end of his cigarette against a nail, "this is perhaps hardly the best moment for me to be offering you advice; but I think you must be ignorant of some things if you're proposing to cultivate the acquaintance of Crewe for Doll's sake."

"I simply don't understand you," she retorted. "Why, under the heavens, should n't I?"

"Because," said Otis bluntly, "the man's in love with Doll."

"He is?"

"Yes," said Otis. "He is."

"How do you know?"

"Oh," he cried, "that does n't matter, does it? Is n't it enough for you if I tell you?"

"No," she retorted, "and I don't believe it. I don't believe anything you say."

"Well," he said patiently, "never mind that. I've warned you and it's up to you to satisfy yourself if I'm right. But I should hardly think it necessary for me to ask you to take no risks. I don't suppose even you want Doll in the Divorce Court, Mrs. Brackett."

She flung the door open.

"Get out!" she cried crudely. The rage in her eyes and voice was intense. Otis left her. Behind him, as he went down the stairs, Mrs. Brackett's front door slammed with a formidable sound. In spite of himself he grinned.

"Gee!" he said as he stopped to light his cigarette. "Who'd be an ambassador?" Then he went back to George.

(5)

The gust of Mrs. Brackett's indignation which had driven Otis Gardner before it out of her flat had been aroused less (as you may, in your simplicity, suppose) by his having dared to join the names of Doll and the Divorce Court than by his suggestion of the possibility that Mrs. Brackett could wish to see her daughter in that place.

Do you not remark the difference?

To tell a doting mother that her child is in danger of coming under the surgeon's knife may be forgiven to any one; but to hint that she can possibly desire such an event is inexpiable.

This is not to say that Mrs. Brackett regarded surgical operations and divorces in precisely the same light, for no analogy is flawless. For her, as to most of us, an operation was a perfectly respectable affair; nay, if it was a fashionable one it might even be said to confer a certain amount of social consideration upon the sufferer; but a divorce, however blameless the circumstances might be, however much advantage might be reaped from it, was, look at it as one might, a disagreeable and notorious business. The names concerned in it became at once the subject of public comment; they were discussed at the commonest of breakfast tables; in short, to go through the Divorce Court was to touch pitch, and every one knows the consequences of that.

In other words, Otis had told Mrs. Brackett that she desired her daughter to be, however blamelessly, however slightly, defiled; and this was the unforgivable offence.

She had not understood him at all.

The possibility of his meaning that Doll might figure as a defendant had not so much as occurred to her. She had fastened singly upon the accusation which Otis seemed to make against herself; but that was enough, and the name of Otis was automatically deleted from her visiting-list.

I have said that it was the notoriety of divorce proceedings which in Mrs. Brackett's eyes made them objectionable. And when I have said this I have said all. To them, on other grounds, she had no dislike whatever. Speaking generally, America regards this question of divorce much more sensibly than does England. The Americans, unfettered by those religious and social traditions and prejudices of a thousand years which clog every attempt of England to do anything reasonable, are much more fortunately situated for the rapid solution of large domestic problems. Whether they succeed any better than we do is not for me to discuss in this place. But that they make more and bolder experiments than we is not to be denied.

They have faced among other things the divorce question in an open-minded and fearless fashion which, if it results sometimes in our entertainment, commands in general our real respect.

I suppose that the attitudes of the two countries towards this thorny matter may be fairly summed up thus; that England thinks it wrong to put asunder those whom God hath joined together, but will do it at a price; and America thinks it wicked for two people, who detest each other, to live together, however respectably they may be married, and will give them every assistance in her power to separate.

I may be wrong — any one may be wrong — but that

is how it appears to me. And I have no doubt whatever that of these two attitudes America's is the more reasonable. Whether it is the more right is another matter, but I cannot go into it here. One book at a time is enough for me.

From these two widely differing attitudes, then, come two results that differ as widely. In England divorce is costly, shameful and unmentionable. Even the wronged and successful party to a cause is regarded as suffering under a stigma. We are a little careful how we ask him or her, especially her, to dinner.

In America, divorce is simple, granted upon all sorts of grounds, and, when obtained, is frankly admitted to be what it is — a subject for sincere, if discreet, congratulation.

Mrs. Brackett's attitude towards divorce was the attitude of her country. It may not have been as easy-going as that of Nevada, but it was no more severe than that of Massachusetts. I do not know exactly what the law of divorce is in Nevada and Massachusetts respectively, but I assume, without much fear, that the West takes the more generous and impatient view.

Let us say that Mrs. Brackett occupied a position midway between these two.

So it was natural that, once the charge which she supposed Otis to have made had been indignantly repelled, the idea of Doll's divorce from her husband (to which the other was subsidiary) should remain with her as a not unwelcome subject for speculation; and perhaps as not a new one. For, subconsciously, at any rate, she must have, many times, entertained the thought since her arrival in England. She now, consciously, caressed it.

Happiness for Doll (the sole object of Mrs. Brackett's existence) must for the future be impossible so long as she should be tied to George March. That was evident. But how was the necessary dissolution of this wretched marriage to be obtained?

Mrs. Brackett was not so ignorant as to suppose that in England divorce is granted upon slight grounds. Indeed, she knew perfectly well what an English wife must be able to prove, in the vast majority of cases, against her husband, before she can have any hope of obtaining her freedom. This knowledge is not uncommon among Americans, especially American women, who are naturally more interested in such matters than the men; and it is the foundation of a belief which exists among them that Englishmen are cruel to their wives above the men of other civilised nations. Nor is this strange. In a country which makes cruelty an essential ground for divorce, cruelty must, one would suppose, be peculiarly common; otherwise, why legislate about it? It is thus that we argue and I dare say it is as good a way of arguing as another.

Mrs. Brackett knew perfectly well, also, that Doll had not the beginnings of a case against George. Cruel to her he had certainly been, but even Mrs. Brackett doubted if his cruelty had exhibited any features which a court of law would recognise. His meanness, gross though it seemed to her, had never threatened Doll's physical health; matinées and motor-cars may be necessities of a young woman's existence in the opinion of all reasonable people, but lawyers are conspicuously not included in that category. Cruelty, for lawyers, is made up of slow starvation, putting in bodily fear by the flourishing of revolvers, turning out of the house on a stormy night,

blows, torture, and such dreadful and unspeakable acts. Cruelty for them is, in short, barbarity. And not even Mrs. Brackett could conscientiously accuse her son-in-law of conduct even remotely resembling barbarity.

As to 'the other thing' — I call it this because I am reflecting the thoughts of one of those delicate minds for whose benefit euphemisms may be said to exist — as to 'the other thing,' that was still more out of the question. George's life was blameless and there was an end of it.

Mrs. Brackett appears to be confronted with a stone wall? Not a bit of it. In the dictionary of Mother-Love, the words Stone Wall are not to be found.

Foiled in one direction, her busy mind was soon in possession of an alternative plan which promised much better. Where compulsion must fail, persuasion may often succeed. To force separation upon George was hopeless; to win his consent seemed quite otherwise to Mrs. Brackett. Surely even George must have enough generosity in him to give his wife the release which she could not demand. To refuse must be to rank himself with the very basest of mankind.

A collusive action! That was the way out of this hateful coil. An undefended action! A mere formality. Certain charges to be brought on one side, certain admissions to be made on the other, and behold! everything satisfactorily and happily at an end; Doll free and happy in her freedom; George (a little spattered, to be sure, but where somebody must be spattered it could not possibly be Doll), — George, I say, free and happy, if not in his freedom, in the consciousness of chivalrous behaviour. Yes, both of them free, free to live their own lives un-

hampered by an unbearable yoke, free, if it pleased them, to seek, in re-marriage, the happiness which together they had failed to obtain.

(6)

Sir Richard Crewe! What was it that Otis had said?

That delightful young fellow! So good-looking, so beautifully mannered, so — so — that is to say, so well-circumstanced for making a wife really happy.

And Otis had said —

The thing was not at all impossible, not even improbable; in fact, it was most likely to be true.

Doll! Could any one — any *man* — resist her?

And if it were true? If it were true?

And if George would only behave with some degree of unselfishness and honour?

At this point in her meditation Mrs. Brackett's eyes lit upon the telephone, the one extravagance of her reduced condition. No American lady can be happy without one of these instruments on her writing-desk, but I do not think that Mrs. Brackett would have been a subscriber had Doll, at The Lawn, not been within speaking distance.

Next moment she was hunting through the C's in the directory. Two minutes later she was making an appointment with Dick for the morrow at half-past nine.

But by no means could Dick get her to tell him what her business was likely to be. Nor is this wonderful, since Mrs. Brackett had not invented it yet.

Having chased sleep for that night from the pillow of Sir Richard Crewe, she hung up the receiver and sat down

to consider what she must say to him. Half an hour later, she rose, tiptoed into her bedroom and listened a moment to the soft and regular breathing which told that Doll slept the dreamless sleep of exhaustion. Then she whispered a benediction, and, after loosening her stays and wrapping herself up in her travelling rug, curled up on the sofa, switched out the lamp, and resolutely closed her eyes.

Soon she too slept. The room was cold and her covering — since she had feared to wake Doll by opening the drawer where her spare pair of blankets were kept — was insufficient.

But a good conscience may be warmer than many blankets.

CHAPTER XIV

(1)

“MRS. BRACKETT, sir,” said Dick’s servant. “In the sitting-room, sir.”

Dick stopped in his prowl round his breakfast-table, threw his cigarette into the fire, poured himself out a cup of half-cold coffee, drank it off, and followed the man out of the room. He crossed the hall of his flat, went through a door which the man held open and shut it after him.

The man, though he ached with curiosity, returned to clear away the untouched food; for he was a servant with a strict sense of self-respect. A letter, lying about, he regarded as anybody’s property; listening outside doors he esteemed beneath him.

Meanwhile Dick had exchanged greetings with his visitor.

Mrs. Brackett had planted herself firmly by the newly lit fire. She had had a cold night and her circulation was not perfectly restored. Excitement, however, now warmed her complexion and the paint was not as conspicuous as it had been when, half an hour earlier, she had left Doll (still half asleep and preparing to swallow the tea and toast which the mother’s devotion had prepared) on the pretext of the day’s marketing.

“Won’t you sit down?” said Dick politely, indicating a chair. Then, as she neither moved nor spoke. “What in Heaven’s name is the matter?” he cried passionately. “If you knew the night I’ve had, Mrs. Brackett! There’s

something wrong, is n't there? There must be for you to be telephoning at midnight like that?"

"Yes," she said at last, "there is something the matter, Sir Richard."

"Well," he cried, "speak out, please. What is it? If your name had been in the telephone book I'd have—Do you know? I was near going out to Hampstead, late as it was. But now you've come, what is it? What's wrong? Is your daughter ill, Mrs. Brackett? Is it that? Oh, for God's sake, can't you speak?"

Mrs. Brackett had no longer any doubts as to the truth of Otis Gardner's words. She had only to look at Crewe to know that he was in a state of mortal anxiety and the object of it could not be far to seek. If he loved Doll, no further explanation of his state was needed; if not, there could be no explanation of it at all.

But though the object of her visit was already gained, it was not possible for her to go away at once. She could not tell him, in so many words, that she had called to discover whether or no he would wish to marry Doll in the event of Doll's obtaining a divorce. Some things simply cannot be said. Nor could she turn and leave him without a word. She had asked for this interview and an interview with him she must have. And since some things could not be, some other things had to be, said. Fortunately she was provided with the sentences which her situation demanded of her.

"First of all, Sir Richard," she said, as she at last sat down, "I have to tell you a very, very dreadful piece of news. My daughter has left her husband."

"Oh, my God!" cried Dick. "What—?"

Mrs. Brackett held up a calming hand. "Yes," she

said. "Just what I feared has happened. Yesterday afternoon there was a quarrel. It is all over. George's meanness and tyranny have at last achieved their inevitable result. And my child has come to me. Yes, Sir Richard, to me. Thank God!" she cried, clasping her hands and glancing towards the ceiling. "Oh, thank God, I was on this side!" Mrs. Brackett very naturally assumed that her conduct in the affair had throughout enjoyed the guidance of that Authority whose approval she now so confidently claimed.

"And what," cried poor, distracted Dick angrily,—"what the devil have I to do with all this, Mrs. Brackett?"

She passed (if she noticed) the profanity. "Simply this, Sir Richard," she said. "Doll and I are Americans. We are strangers in a strange land. The friends and relatives of George March are the only friends we have had. Of course, we have other acquaintances, but —"

"I am no friend of George March," he interrupted roughly.

"Thank you for that, Sir Richard. I value that very much. And indeed if I had not hoped to hear it, do you think I should be with you now? If I had not felt that I could count on you, that you understand the state of affairs, do you fancy I could have sought your advice? No, Sir Richard. I could not. But I did feel that very thing. You and I have spoken about Doll and her husband before this and it was only that that gave me the courage to ring you up last night. When a woman is fixed as I am to-day, Sir Richard, she is pretty apt to know where she can go after friendship with prospect of success. I turned to you, Sir Richard, just naturally. I knew you would not desert us."

She paused to wipe a tear. The action was very effective.

Dick lit a cigarette mechanically. "And what," he asked, "do you want *me* to do for you? Anything I can, of course. You can command me. Delighted, I'm sure." He tailed off into sheer mumblings, for he knew neither what he did nor said. Mad visions of the Hitherto-Incredible blinded him to actualities.

"Why," said Mrs. Brackett, with a rather more sprightly manner than she had yet displayed, — "why, Sir Richard, you can do a very great deal for us. Don't you appreciate that Doll and I are now, with the exception of yourself, quite without real friends in all England? It will be impossible, of course, for my girl to accept any help from George March, — I need not even say that to a man of your delicacy of feeling, — and we are reduced to living on the small remnant of my own fortune which has been spared to me. It is not much, Sir Richard, but, carefully managed, it will, I hope, suffice. And this brings me to my object in coming round to see you this morning. My investments —" She paused, and opened her handbag.

"Go on," said Dick miserably. She had come to consult him about her investments! Damn her investments! This was not what he had dreamt a moment ago.

"This is a list of them," she continued blandly. Nonetheless, the cruel disillusionment that had taken place under her eyes had not escaped them. "I just want you, Sir Richard, to glance over what is on this paper, and to tell me, as a man who knows the world and invests money of his own, no less than as a good friend, whether these securities are such as I ought to hold on to, or whether

I can't perhaps find something which will bring me a rather bigger return. You see, my poor little income must keep Doll, now, as well as myself, and every cent will be of importance. It was not so always with me, Sir Richard, as I think you know." She dried an eye. "One time I could give my child anything — *anything*, Sir Richard, that she wanted or that I could imagine for her. But those days are gone." She dried the other. "And I need n't expect ever to see them again." She paused. Then: "Well," she went on gravely, "it's no use quarrelling with what's happened. It's much better, don't you think, Sir Richard? to look round and see how one can make the best of what's *happening*. And I have n't any time to lose. So if you'll just take a glance at this poor little schedule that I've brought along and write me later in the morning any suggestions that may occur to you, I'll be ever so grateful. Or perhaps you'll come in one day and have tea with us and tell me what you think."

"Delighted," said Dick. "Any time — charmed, of course." He did n't know what he said.

Mrs. Brackett rose abruptly. "I'll write you," she said. "And now I must n't keep you from what you want to do." With these words she placed her paper on the mantelpiece and held out both hands. "Thank you again," she said energetically. "Thank you ten thousand times. There are friends of all sorts and sizes, but you, Sir Richard, *you* are the real goods." She laughed to excuse her slang, gripped his hands, gave them one strong downward shake, and glanced towards the door as a hint to him to open it and let her go.

Dick, however, did not take the hint. Nor did he

loosen the grasp with which he held her hands. He had something to say.

"Mrs. Brackett," he began, "I'll give you all the advice about your money that I can; though that's not much, for I hardly ever change a security and leave all that sort of thing to my solicitors. But I've got to tell you something else. It's a hard thing to say to you, who are Doll's mother, but I must say it. Doll's got a friend in me who'll do more for her than try to advise her about her investments. More? By God, I'd do anything, everything. If she wanted all I have in the world, it'd be hers for the asking. I'd give it up joyfully to save her little finger from aching. So remember, you can count on me, where Doll's concerned, absolutely. Absolutely, Mrs. Brackett. If George — damn him! — can't value her at her proper worth, I can."

He dropped her hands abruptly, went to the door and opened it. So in silence they passed into the hall where, still in silence, he let her out of the flat and put her into the lift. He had said all that he wished to say. So had Mrs. Brackett. Besides, it was not an occasion for polite observations. As the lift carried her down, their eyes met and said farewell; but Dick returned to his flat with the uneasy sensation that there had been something not wholly like gratitude in Mrs. Brackett's glance. Something like — like — like triumph, was it?

(2)

Mrs. Brackett was home before Doll had wakened from her second sleep. She let herself in with her latchkey, peeped through the bedroom door, gloated a moment

upon the slumbering girl; then darted into the kitchenette and set on a saucepan to warm the rose-water for Doll's face. Then she broke into a bowl an 'invalid' egg which she had just bought at a dairy, added milk, and beat up the two together with a whisk. This done to her satisfaction she returned to the bedroom, waked Doll and persuaded her to drink the custard. "You're all run down, lamb," she told her, "with the trouble you've been through; you've just *got* to be built up again, and egg flip's splendid for building up. So take it, like mother's own girl."

Doll obeyed listlessly. She was very tired and very miserable. It was wonderful to have her mother petting and spoiling her again; but — but — She forced down the regrets which, taking her unawares, had almost become articulate. She would *not* regret what she had done. She would *not*. She would *not*. She was *not* miserable; only very tired. And even if she *was* miserable, she must not let it appear; not on any account. That would be a pretty way of standing by her mother and taking her part against George. It would be to show that she regretted having done it; which she certainly did not do. If only for her mother's sake she must be bright and cheerful; she must try to be glad that she had left The Lawn yesterday. It was n't as if she had n't been perfectly right. Of *course* she had been right. No one with any self-respect could have stood by, while her mother was 'called down' like that, and done anything else. If that was what George thought of her mother, if that was the way he could speak to her mother, if that was . . . and so on. And so on. Over and over again she trod the round of her last night's thoughts, justifying

herself, justifying her mother, stirring and blowing the embers of her resentment against George, ever advancing a step nearer to contentment.

By the time she had sipped all her egg Mrs. Brackett was back at the bedside with face-cloths and cold cream and the rose-water. Doll, glad of the diversion, yielded herself up quite passively to her mother's deft and soothing ministrations, and for some time everything was forgotten by the mother but the delights of her employment, by the daughter but the sensuous pleasure of a toilet whose every moment was marked by a lingering and delicious caress. Mrs. Brackett may have had a will like iron, but her fingers were very soft, and when they touched Doll they were lighter than swan's-down.

This business done Mrs. Brackett devoted half an hour of unalloyed happiness to a complete and scientific massage of her child's beautiful body: nothing that was worth knowing about the manipulation of muscles and the stimulation of the blood was unknown to this paragon of mothers. If she did not possess certificates of proficiency in the art which she was now practising it was not for lack of skill, but simply because she had never thought it worth her while to claim them from her teachers. But why should she, with all her money, have cared for such pasteboard proofs of her industry and ability? She had but one client, nor did she wish for more than one; and all the reward she asked for the many hours' patient work which she had given to the acquirement of her knowledge and dexterity was that sometimes Doll should murmur, as she murmured now, "There's nobody that's a circumstance to you, mother, massing." Manicure and pedicure succeeded to the massage.

Followed a new source of maternal bliss — the Putting on of the Clothes — or some of them. Doll was an admirable patient, allowing herself with perfect good humour to be slowly covered up, never making by sound or movement a sign that the process irritated or wearied her, or that she knew that she could have done it all, by herself, twice as quickly. Nor was she irritated or wearied, not to-day, at any rate. The massage had done its work upon her too well for that. And her mother seemed her only friend in the world.

Now came the Hair-Brushing and the Doing of the Hair; then the Donning of the Blouse and Skirt; the Exchange of the Bedroom Slippers for the Patent Leathers; till at last Doll stood up, clad and groomed, a perfect work of Nature and art, to the customary accompaniment of Mrs. Brackett's ecstatic coo, "My Doll, My Little Doll That Came Alive!"

With the completion of her toilet Doll emerged from that semi-hypnotic state which Mrs. Brackett's service had induced. It was as if those last subtle touches of her own hands to her hair and at her waist, of which no other hands were capable, re-established as an independent Identity the passive object of her mother's solicitude; as if the little shake which she gave herself severed some last clinging thread of dominance.

"Mother," she said, "we must go away from here at once. We can't go on living in Hampstead. I could n't bear it if we were to meet that man on the street some day." The first application to George by Mrs. Brackett of the fatal words, 'that man,' marked (as I pointed out when I had occasion to record it) a stage; that stage had now been reached by Doll. Mrs. Brackett's were

not the ears to miss a thing like that, and her satisfaction was so great that she actually welcomed Doll's proposal, though to leave Hampstead now must put a strain on her resources which, as she knew very well, they were badly fitted to bear.

"We'll go," she said emphatically, "the very minute we can find another apartment and I guess that won't take very long."

"Oh," cried Doll, "but I can't go on living in London at all. We must go back home, to America, mother. I want to get right away, right out of this horrible country where we've been so wretched. I don't suppose I can ever be happy again, but it seems as if I might stand a chance in America. I believe that if I could once see all the windows of those New York skyscrapers blinking a welcome to me in the sun, I could try to begin to forget that there is such a place as England anywhere. It would be like waking out of a bad dream and knowing that one is safe in one's own bed. America would seem very good to me just now, mother."

Mrs. Brackett did not tell her that it was impossible for them to go to America for several months to come, since, even if they could get rid at once of the Hampstead flat, her balance at the bank was not, and would not be till certain dividends should come in, large enough for them to make a voyage across the Atlantic, to which undertaking the payment of money down is an essential preliminary. Nor did she tell her that certain plans which she had conceived for her child's future might, if they should be brought to a successful end, make any such step unnecessary. Mrs. Brackett did not want to go back to America if, by any other means, Doll's happy

ness could be secured. She had been rich in America and had no mind to be poor there if she could help it. This, at any rate, was not the moment for a full disclosure of their financial situation; nor, decidedly, for any hint of those plans to be allowed to escape her.

"You're right, lamb," she said. "You're perfectly right, as you always are. Home's the place for you and me and we'll go the very first moment we can. But we can't do everything, *now*, just exactly when we feel like it. I can't, for instance, telephone this minute for a cabin on the first steamer and take you down to Liverpool this afternoon and have you in New York within the week. That sort of thing was possible to us once, but it is n't so any longer, as we both know. So just try to have a little patience with mother and trust her to do her very best for her girl. And as a beginning I'm going to put this apartment in the hands of some of these real estate men right away."

"I'll come along," Doll exclaimed gladly. What she needed was action of any kind.

"No, lamb; no," said her mother soothingly. "I want you to rest yourself altogether to-day. You've just gone through a very trying time and you're all run down, and if we are n't very careful I shall have a sick daughter to add to my other troubles, and you don't want that, I know. So, for my sake, be a good girl and lie right down on this ottoman and look at the pictures in this *Sketch* that I brought in for you. I'll be back soon, and after luncheon we'll both of us sit down and have a talk about what we're going to do and how we're going to do it." She picked up the rug, wrapped in which she had spent the previous night, and pointed

invitingly to the sofa; and Doll, because she was too miserable to argue, after permitting herself to be swathed in the thing, took the place appointed to her and allowed *The Sketch* to be put into her hands.

Mrs. Brackett whipped on a hat and seized her handbag.

"Good-bye," she cried cheerfully from the door. "Keep smiling." She blew a kiss towards her daughter and vanished.

Doll dropped *The Sketch* on to the floor and, folding her hands in front of her, was still. Her head lay among the cushions which her mother had piled behind her; her feet were wrapped in the rug which her mother had folded around her; by her side lay the magazine which her mother had brought for her, and the bottle of salts (which her mother had placed there) stood ready to her hand on the chair which her mother had brought up to the sofa. But her mother had no place in her thoughts.

Her great, lovely eyes remained wide open, staring at the opposite wall, and every now and then a big tear overflowed and ran down her cheek. She made no effort to dry these tears; indeed, she was unconscious of them.

(3)

Mrs. Brackett salved her conscience by stopping for a minute in the office of a house-agent; then she set her face to the hill and, with a brisk step and determined air, marched away in the direction of The Lawn.

Courage was not lacking to Mrs. Brackett, but it was not her climb that made her heart beat so strongly as she rang the bell of George's house. The task which she

had set herself was one which, I suppose, nobody could have faced quite without a tremor. It was, however, with a perfectly steady voice that she told Clara, who opened the door to her, to ask if Mr. March could see her. The girl, bursting with excitement, put her in the drawing-room and hastened away to the studio. It seemed to Clara that it would be a hundred years before she could get back to the kitchen.

She found George walking about in the studio with a palette and brushes in his hand. On an easel a half-finished picture awaited his attentions, as it had awaited them for the past hour and three quarters. George, with a wise instinct, had perceived that in hard work lay his only chance of escape from the thoughts that tore and devoured him; but though instinct may take a man to his easel it cannot make him paint. George had set his palette and forced himself to begin work, but a very few minutes saw the end of his poor effort to be wise. His miseries quickly carried him away from the easel, to walk up and down, up and down the long, light room, with never a thought for his picture and never a wish but for Doll.

"Please, sir," said Clara, big-eyed and breathless, "Mrs. Brackett wishes to see you. She's in the drawing-room, sir."

George stopped dead. "Mrs. Brackett?" he echoed in the extremity of surprise.

"Yes, sir," said Clara. "Wishes to see you most particular, sir."

"Mrs. Brackett?" he cried again and this time his voice was joyful. A sudden wild hope had entered into him. Was this, then, an embassy? Had 'this woman' come, remorseful, to try to undo some of the damage she

had worked? It was possible. Nay, it could be nothing else. Were it not so, how could she have had the impudence to present herself in his house? Or had she come, perhaps, to say that she had reconsidered her rejection of the allowance which he had offered to Doll? At once his mushroom hope forsook him. Yes, this was why she had come. Well, let her say her say. Let him get it over. Nothing was to be gained by delay.

"I'll go to her, Clara," he said dully. "I'll go at once." Then, still holding his palette and brushes, he walked slowly past the girl, and moving with a strange, blundering step, disappeared down the passage in the direction of the drawing-room. By the time he had reached it Clara was halfway to the kitchen.

To receive Dick Mrs. Brackett had stood; for George she had seated herself; and herein is expressed the difference between the request of a favour and the demand of a right. She sat bolt upright, her nostrils slightly dilated and her hands firmly clasped upon her knees.

George appeared in the doorway and stood there for a moment looking at her intently as if he strove singly to read her purpose and had no thought of the civilities usually expected from a gentleman upon whom a lady has called. And this was, precisely, the case.

He spoke no word; only stared at her. But his whole attitude expressed his mood of eager enquiry.

Mrs. Brackett's voice, as soon as she spoke, banished every vestige of hope from his heart.

"I have come," she said, carefully refraining from giving him any name at all, "to make a proposal to which, if you have any sense at all of what is right, you must surely agree."

He came a few steps into the room and stopped. "Go on," he said. "Go on. Make your proposal."

"I mean to," she retorted, "and it is this. By your conduct to my daughter and to me you have killed whatever love she may once have had for you."

"Well?" he said patiently. "Well?"

"Except in name," she continued, "Doll is therefore no longer your wife."

"Well?" he repeated.

"You admit that?" she cried.

"No," he said, "I admit nothing. I am waiting to hear what you have come to say."

"Then I say that Doll is no longer your wife except in name. In the eyes of the law she is; in the eyes of every person who can see straight she is not. Where love has died there can be no real marriage. I am asking you to complete what you have done. I am asking you to give Doll her freedom."

"I don't understand you," he said coldly. His fighting blood was beginning to stir in response to the hostility in her voice. Suddenly he squared his shoulders, came to the fireplace, leaned against the mantelpiece, put his hands in his pockets, and stood looking down upon her. "I don't understand you at all," he said again. "It seems to me that Doll has taken her freedom. I have made no attempt to prevent her from doing so. I have offered her an allowance which you have declined on her behalf. And mark me, Mrs. Brackett," he cried, excitement suddenly getting the better of him, "your refusal is not enough for me. I mean to have Doll's own word for that. Understand that!" He jerked himself clear of the mantelpiece, took a hand out of a pocket, leaned forward, and shook

his finger at her. Then, catching hold of himself again, he put his hand back and resumed his former attitude. "But that apart," he continued, "perhaps you will tell me what more I can do."

"I certainly will," she said calmly — she had not flinched under his recent menace. "You can give her — as I told you a moment ago — complete liberty. A woman is not made *free* by living in another house than her husband's."

"Free?" he said. "More free? Do you mean some kind of judicial separation? If so, I can assure you it's not necessary. Doll need n't be afraid that I shall persecute her to come back to me."

"No," she said, "I don't mean that. I mean complete, absolute separation. I mean divorce."

"Divorce!" he cried. "Divorce! Good God! are you mad? How on earth do you suppose we could get a divorce? This is n't Reno. An English court of law requires — But what's the good of even talking about it?" He laughed angrily. "The idea's simply lunacy," he said.

This annoyed Mrs. Brackett.

"If you had an ounce of chivalry in you, George March," she informed him heatedly, "you would be only too glad to make up in this way for all you've caused my poor girl to suffer. Why, it's the only thing you *can* do."

He perceived that he must reason with her.

"My poor Mrs. Brackett," he said, "must I again tell you that what you suggest is impossible? Do you hear? Impossible. Neither Doll nor I have done anything that would entitle either of us to a divorce."

"Who asks you to 'do' anything?" she snapped, for

she was beginning to feel that her mission might not be going to succeed. "Have you never heard of a formal action? I guess the lawyers call it a collusive one. Does n't that seem possible to you?"

"No," said George, "it does n't. And if it did, do you think I'd consent to bring accusations of that sort against Doll, even if —" He broke off, appalled by the discovery that Mrs. Brackett was on her feet and that her eyes were blazing within a few inches of his own.

"Don't you dare," she shouted, — "don't you dare to make any such suggestion to me, George March. Do you suppose I meant *you* to be the one to bring the action? Did you actually imagine that I would consent to my child being branded as the *defendant* in a suit for divorce? Ha!" she trumpeted. "It's easy to see that this is England. Why, there's not one last man between New York and the Pacific that would have had the courage to say such a thing to a mother, or the vile mind to think of it."

George was too bitterly angry to smile.

"Then," he said, — and his voice was by this time icy, — "am I to assume that you wish *me* to be the defendant in this precious collusive action? You propose that *I* should be branded adulterer, do you?"

"What else?" she demanded. "What else? Are n't you the *man*?"

At this George did laugh. Quite suddenly he passed from a state of deadly wrath to one of almost hysterical amusement. He threw himself into a chair and gave himself up to guffaws, while Mrs. Brackett, making no attempt to speak, sat down again and looked wonderingly and furiously on. At length George became once more articulate.

"Oh, my goodness!" he gasped; "if I did n't detest you so heartily, Mrs. Brackett, I believe I could love you for that last speech of yours. I'm the *man*, am I? And that means, does n't it? that I'm to play the chivalrous knight to beauty in distress in all conceivable circumstances or be abandoned to the contempt of all right-thinking people like yourself. Well, my dear Mrs. Brackett, if that's the case I'm afraid you must get ready to use some of that contempt of yours. For I have n't any smallest thought of falling in with your extremely moderate and reasonable suggestion. What!" he cried, throwing off his laughter and springing to his feet. "Have n't you done enough yet? Are you to steal my wife's love from me? Am I to be sacrificed to your mad mother's jealousy? Is my life to be made a misery for months and a desolation, now, until I die? And is that not sufficient for you. Must I also, that your triumph may be perfect, drag my decent name through the mud of the Divorce Court and figure in the eyes of the world as a blackguard forevermore? Well, I say No, Mrs. Brackett. You ask too much and I say No, No, No. If Doll — as it seems — can't live with me and prefers you, she must do as she pleases. I won't give her any further cause for complaint. As far as I can secure her freedom for her I will secure it. But I will *not* become the defendant in a collusive action, nor will I — if you should ever bring yourself to contemplate it — become the plaintiff. You seem to think such an action would be a simple affair, a mere matter of form; but you may take it from me that it's nothing of the kind, and that if its nature is discovered there are all sorts of very disagreeable penalties attached to the discovery. I don't suppose you want to see Doll go to gaol, do you? — however glad

you might be to see me there. But all this apart. If a collusive action were as safe as you please, I would n't take any part in one. Doll married me. She made a mistake, and we're separated. And there it must remain, Mrs. Brackett. There it must remain. You observe that I reply to you direct and send no message to Doll. And the reason why I do so is that I don't believe Doll knows anything about this suggestion that you've been making here this morning. I believe it's entirely your own idea. Only a very profound malice could have imagined such a thing, and Doll, whatever her faults may be, is utterly incapable of malice. If you had told her of this scheme she would have shrunk from the gross iniquity of it and she would never have let you come. I will not insult her by even thinking that she knows about it, and so my answer is addressed to you alone, Mrs. Brackett, and that answer is 'No!'"

With the last word George suddenly opened the door of the drawing-room and held it wide.

The invitation was not to be ignored and Mrs. Brackett rose slowly from her chair.

"Well, George March —" she began, but George interrupted her.

"The door, Mrs. Brackett," he said, and pointed through it. Civility is not for honest men who are filled with righteous wrath.

Mrs. Brackett risked no second interruption of the kind. Without another word she passed through the door, down the hall, and so, out into the road, slamming the hall door emphatically behind her. Her castle in the air was in ruins. Crewe must *not* be asked to tea.

George went back to the studio. Rather to his surprise

he found that he was able to paint, and until the light failed him he worked furiously upon his picture; nor could his servants win him away from his easel to any lunch or tea.

But when the light failed . . .

CHAPTER XV

(1)

PERHAPS it was just as well for Mrs. Brackett that George had not agreed to the plan which she had desired for the solution of all their troubles; for, inflated with the pride of achievement, she must have told the news to Doll at the first opportunity; and this would have presented itself on her return to her flat.

The weakness of dominance, long and regularly exercised, is this; that the superior will acquires inevitably the belief that the inferior must always and in everything be content to be directed. That any serious difference of opinion can ever arise between them seems absurd; as for independent action, it is unthinkable.

Mrs. Brackett, having come to hate George and being quite certain that she had the best of reasons for doing so, was unable to conceive that Doll, when once she had ranged herself on her mother's side of the quarrel, could entertain one regret for the husband whom she had left. Nothing could have more dismally surprised Mrs. Brackett than the sight (could she have witnessed it) of those large, slow tears that we have seen welling up in Doll's poor eyes and rolling unchecked down her face.

It was, therefore, fortunate for her that she could not, by announcing to Doll the approaching dissolution of her marriage, challenge the expression of the girl's pleasure at the prospect.

But it had so happened that no such joyful announce-

ment was hers to make; nor did she feel that it was her duty to offer any report of her recent interview with George. She had not gained her object, and no satisfaction which she might win from criticism of his unchivalrous conduct seemed capable of balancing the humiliation of confessing her own failure. If George had agreed to the proposed collusive action it would have been not only delightful but necessary to tell Doll about it; but his refusal had made silence on the subject a thing both that Mrs. Brackett herself wished and by which Doll could in no way be hurt.

Mrs. Brackett, therefore, made no mention of her visit to The Lawn and confined herself to a recital of her dealings with certain house agents, for which purpose she had, on her way home, looked in upon two more of those disappointing optimists. Mrs. Brackett had a very correct horror of Falsehood which she rigidly distinguished from Suppression of the Truth.

Doll did not even try to be interested in what her mother had been doing. She wanted to get away from Hampstead, to get away from England; how these things were to be accomplished did not seem to matter. She had learned, during her life with George, that in this world it is not always possible for the fulfilment of a wish to follow immediately upon its conception, and she was therefore a little less impatient of delay than she might have been had that experience never been hers; but this question of their removal seemed to her so vital to her peace of mind as to be removed beyond any application of her newly acquired knowledge. They were concerned, now, not with automobiles and wall-papers and matinées, but with something which affected the very foundation of

her tranquillity, and she could not imagine that, however poorly off she and her mother might be, any postponement could be allowed to the realisation of her wish. Here Mrs. Brackett herself began to reap what she had so long and industriously sowed; what hitherto it had been George's lot to reap.

(2)

No one, however, is wholly abandoned by Fortune, and the good luck which had once been Mrs. Brackett's saw fit, at this crisis in her affairs, to reassert itself.

They had barely finished their meagre but dainty mid-day meal when the bell of the flat rang, and there entered, armed with a house agent's permit, a very good-looking, very fair, rather vulgar young woman, accompanied by an elderly buck, tweed-clad, white-spatted, and of Oriental appearance. The lady explained that she and her uncle were in search of a little flat handy to the Hampstead Conservatoire, where she was to study singing during the winter, with a view to improving her position on the Stage. And might they have a look round now, as they were rather pressed for time?

Certainly they might, said Mrs. Brackett. She guessed also, with a smile, that the inspection would n't set them back in time, anyway, to any considerable extent. It was a cute little place, was n't it? but, if it was small, it was cosy; and this was the living-room and this was the bedroom and this was the kitchenette and this was the bathroom and this was the cupboard and that seemed to be about all, she was afraid. It was a pity there was no place for a servant (this disadvantage could not

well be concealed), but, after all, there was really not enough work for one whole maid, and it was much cheaper to get a woman to come in, mornings, to clean up and lay the fires, and, evenings, to prepare the dinner. As for lunch it was the best fun to cook up some little thing on the gas stove. They would notice that with the South aspect one got all the sun there was, which, in Hampstead, was really a great deal, for England. This geyser in the bathroom was another great advantage; boiling water any minute of the day or night. And it was much better to be high up above the street, was n't it? especially for any one who was a singer. The air could n't be too pure for a singer, could it?

Thus Mrs. Brackett. She had never tried to let a house in her life, but you would not have supposed it, so skilfully did she insist upon the merits, explain away the obvious drawbacks, and forget to mention the disadvantages of her residence. But I have never asked you to suppose Mrs. Brackett lacked intelligence and her wits were stimulated by the urgent need of satisfying her child's wish to be gone from Hampstead.

The uncle was charmed with the place: the niece seemed less pleased. She pointed out, with touching fore-thought for her relative's convenience, that he would find the stairs very trying when he should come to see her. But he pooh-poohed this. He was not a young man, to be sure, but he hoped he could manage a few stairs still. And there was nothing for the lungs like climbing stairs, provided one did n't rush it. He had heard a friend of his, a musician of world-wide reputation, say that stair-climbing was the finest imaginable exercise for a singer. Absolutely.

The niece, pouting, said that she had hoped for a maid. It was so scarey for a lady living all alone. And chars were such disagreeable-looking things to have about, with their dirty faces and aprons. What *she* had wanted was a neat girl, to open the door and serve the meals.

The uncle said that one could n't have everything in this world, whatever one might hope for in the next, and that it would n't run to a piano *and* a maid. He repeated that *he* thought the flat charming. Absolutely. There were plenty of girls, he added, with avuncular severity, who would be only too glad and grateful for such a cosy little nest. For the lady (bowing to Mrs. Brackett) was right. Cosy was the word. Absolutely.

Possibly the reference to those other girls of less difficult disposition than her own touched some chord of shame in the niece's bosom, for, quite regardless of the presence of Mrs. Brackett and Doll, she patted him on the cheek with that effect of being perfectly at home in any company which is said to be the most unmistakable sign of good-breeding, and remarked that he was a stingy old darling, but that she loved him just the same. Soon afterwards these delightful people went away, after saying that they would think about it and that Mrs. Brackett would hear as soon as they had made up their minds. Mrs. Brackett, of course, said that, as there was a great demand for flats in Hampstead just then, they must not blame her if she parted with the place to their disappointment; and they said that, of course, they would n't dream of such a thing.

Half an hour later a young man from the house agent arrived to say that Miss Truly Good was prepared to take the flat and would be glad to move in as soon as

Mrs. Brackett could make it convenient to move out, which the young man from the house agent assumed, having regard to what Mrs. Brackett had said that morning to their Mr. Hawley, would be within the week.

(3)

Doll having been convinced that the journey to America was not within their power for some time to come, they set to work without delay to discover some temporary resting-place which should serve them until departure from England should become possible to them.

In Putney they found a little flat of the same character as the Hampstead one, and thither they removed only four days after the visit of Miss Good and her indulgent relative. The transport and instalment of Mrs. Brackett's few bits of furniture was a simple matter, and before Miss Good could have taken possession they were settled down at the other end of London as completely as if they had lived there for years.

It is hard to say why they chose Putney, but perhaps it is just as hard to say why they should not have chosen it. So long as they were at a long distance from Hampstead, all parts of London (Mayfair being out of the question) were the same to Doll. The agent to whom they applied happened to have several flats to fill in Putney, and it was in Putney accordingly that he advised them to begin their search; and as their search could not be a long one it is not extraordinary that in Putney it was concluded. After all, they only wanted a place to rest in and save a little money in; a few months would see them out of England for good. This was how Doll

looked at it; and though her mother may have had other ideas on the subject she did not think it necessary or advisable to advance them for the present.

Now, while Putney is a very desirable suburb in all sorts of ways, and no doubt deserves all the praises which house agents with flats to fill can possibly bestow upon it, no one, not even a house agent, can honestly describe it as exciting. Wimbledon Common and Richmond Park are, it is true, but a step away, and in the spring the work of the university crews on the river lends interest to a promenade along the towing-path. Putney has its Cinema Theatres, and, I am prepared to believe, its Two Shows a Night Music Hall, but beyond these it can have little to attract the confirmed matinée-goer. Omnibuses and trams depart from Putney in all directions to all parts of London, but they all take the deuce of a time to reach their destination and in foggy weather they very often never get there at all. And foggy weather, in the winter, is rather the rule than the exception in the Thames Valley. And Doll and her mother went to Putney at the beginning of the winter.

A little consideration will show that Mrs. Brackett had undertaken an enterprise which might well have made her heart quail. But, first, Mrs. Brackett's was a very stout heart, and, secondly, she had never had any experience of the Thames Valley in winter. She could not possibly know what she had let herself in for. With an income five times as great as that which she had, and so, with the help of constant expensive distractions, she might have won through successfully, though I doubt it. To do it on two hundred a year and at the same time save money for a journey to America was impos-

sible and only her ignorance can excuse her for attempting it.

Doll, of all people, was least fitted to spend a foggy, muddy winter in a cheap little flat with nothing to do there (since Mrs. Brackett insisted on doing it all) and nowhere to go outside for amusements. Having all her life been accustomed to receiving a constant succession of pleasurable stimulants in the shape of theatres, concerts, dances, dinners, and similar things, and having never been allowed to be alone for more than ten minutes at a time during those hours of the day when young men are permitted to exhaust themselves to entertain young women, she had never acquired any habits of reading, piano-playing, painting, or anything else which serve to pass their hours for less-sought girls. After half an hour any novel bored her; music, unless it was produced by some high-priced virtuoso or orchestra, said nothing to her; nor had she ever heard the Summons of Art to the daubing of water-colour boards. She was, in a word, resourceless. Set her among amusing people, and she could be as much amused as anybody. Take her to the play, and she could follow it with pleasure and talk about it afterwards with some show of intelligence. Surround and warm her with love and the sweet, sincere flatteries that love can breathe and the thousand gifts that love can bring, and she, asking for nothing better, could expand and bloom and be beautiful and kind. But leave her to herself and life became for her a perfectly tasteless possession which, unless something exciting promised in the near future, was not worth the trouble of retaining.

Conceive this poor soul in a three-room flat in Putney,

with fog, through weeks on end, for twenty miles in every direction. And remember that while, in her heart, she longed for George every minute of the day and lamented that she had lost him forever, her love for her mother and her own pride were allied in a perpetual painful struggle, every day a little less successful, to stifle the pleadings of her heart and to feed the flames of her indignation at an injustice which she was beginning to doubt and of her scorn at an avarice in which she no longer honestly believed.

Only the thought of America kept her up at all, only the prospect of a not very distant departure from this hated England, where all her life had come to ruin, enabled her to face each day as it came without utter despair. But each dawn brought her one day nearer to the moment, passionately desired, when she should at last put forth across the broad sea that flowed between her and the only place where it seemed possible that happiness could ever again, even for a moment, come to her.

If hope deferred makes, as it is said to do, the heart sick, what kind of a medicine will it be for a heart that is already pining? Had the American adventure been definitely dated in the calendar of Doll's future, it might have acted successfully against the depression wrought in her by her misfortunes; but it was not and could not be so dated. At the beginning it was to be 'in a few weeks'; then in a month or two. While, in one way, every day assuredly brought it nearer, in another it only seemed once again to postpone it. Quickly to save forty or fifty pounds — it never occurred to these two poor women to travel in the steerage — out of an income of twenty-five pounds a month is no easy matter for any-

body, and it is again to be remarked that Mrs. Brackett had only recently passed out of the ranks of the rich, and that Doll presented to her a constant temptation to small extravagances, grapes for breakfast, a new pair of white kid gloves — you can imagine the sort of thing as easily as I can supply instances of it. Thus the necessary sum seemed every day to become more and more hopeless of attainment, — they were too proud to borrow, as they might have done, from friends in America or acquaintances in London, — and Doll, who at first had been buoyed up with the thought of speedy release from the misery of existence in England, gradually and visibly sank under the perpetual nervous irritation that attends the long-continued postponement of any ardently desired event.

I say she sank visibly, and this circumstance presented Mrs. Brackett with a most tragic dilemma. Somehow money had to be saved for this American voyage; for she was now as eager as Doll to be gone from England. In the article of shelter the limit appeared to have been reached; over clothing no further economy seemed possible; food alone offered a field for increased thrift. And Doll evidently stood in need of the most generous possible fare. Yet to feed her as she required was to spend money which might carry her to America. To save money for the voyage was to condemn Doll to an insufficient diet. Need we wonder that the mother snatched at the nearest good and risked the future distress of Doll's mind for the sake of her body's immediate welfare?

But however much she secretly robbed the American plan for the nourishment of her child, Doll steadily

declined in health. The roses — as they say — faded from her cheeks, her face became thin, her eyes lost their colour and light, her very hair grew dull and lifeless. She moped all day on the sofa, wrapped in a rug, too listless to read, too uninterested to attend if her mother read aloud. Great, heavy sighs escaped her continually and her eyes seemed never quite free from tears. She refused to go out of doors, nor could her mother urge it, for the fog lay remorselessly upon the land and the rain fell steadily, day after day. Mrs. Brackett tried to get her to play cards; Doll wearied of cards in an afternoon. Illustrated magazines alone seemed able to distract her from the contemplation of her own sorrows. And illustrated magazines cost money.

December passed — imagine their Christmas! January and February dragged their weary days out and went their unregretted way. March set in with its freezing winds, and April, the month of Hope, was already within reach. But what hope could it bring to the Putney flat?

One day, without any discoverable cause, Doll developed a cold in the head which persisted for three days and then descended into her chest and turned quickly to bronchitis. Mrs. Brackett was nearly distracted, for Doll had, within her experience, never been ill in her life except once when, at the age of five, measles had mildly annoyed her. A week of steam kettles, cough mixtures, and poultices followed, with milk and new-laid eggs and boiled sole and chicken later on. Everybody who reads this story knows what bronchitis involves, but not everybody who reads this story knows what nursing it means when every penny spent on medicine

and nourishment is badly wanted for quite other purposes.

When the worst of it was over, the doctor, who had been very kind and attentive, after congratulating Mrs. Brackett on the fact that it had been no worse, as indeed, he said, it might very well have been, expressed himself as greatly dissatisfied with Doll's general state of health. "Your daughter," he said, "is not in a good way at all, Mrs. Brackett. There is great, very great lassitude, and of all things which I fear to meet in my work, lassitude is what I fear most. I think I can stand up to anything but that; but it beats me. I can do no more good here. Your daughter is quite safe for the time, and it would be only robbing you for me to keep on coming to see her. What remains to be done must be done by you and by herself. She must be stirred up, Mrs. Brackett, and made to take an interest in life. Otherwise I will not answer for what may happen. Feed her up by all means, give her port wine, oysters, if she likes them, plenty of good red meat from the best cuts, game and poultry and fish, of course. Let her avoid twice-cooked meat, which lacks the nourishment she urgently needs. Fresh fruit, again, will be capital for her, if it be really good; I mean, for instance, none of those hard little Spanish grapes. But English muscats — perfect, perfect. And above all, Mrs. Brackett, take her away from Putney. To keep her in this place in the winter is madness. Of course I don't know how you're situated, and an absolute removal may be impossible, but I do urge you, Mrs. Brackett, to take her away to the sea for at least a fortnight and, if possible, a month. I know of no place that is likely to do her greater good than Brighton

and I would recommend a bedroom looking south to the sea and sun in either the Grand or the Metropole. Remember what she needs is stirring up, taking out of herself. That is why I suggest a cheerful, lively hotel rather than lodgings. Let her walk a quarter of a mile, the first day, along the front towards Hove — you can measure it to an inch on the plan they sell with the shilling guide; half a mile the second day, and so on gradually up to three miles; and always on the front. I often say that you can see more amusing incidents in a hundred yards of the Brighton Front than in any other hundred yards of the whole coast-line of Europe. Let her walk and be diverted and eat all she can and sleep all she wants and I guarantee that she'll be a new creature in three weeks. But I dread Putney for her, and if you *could* get a furnished flat for yourselves in Hove, — you can do capitally for about six guineas a week, — I should strongly advise you to do so."

And so on and so on.

I do not ask you to believe that any doctor in Hampstead or anywhere else could be such an ass as to talk in this way to a widow woman, in obviously very straitened circumstances; but the programme which Doll's doctor actually sketched was very nearly as unrealisable as that which my fancy has put into his mouth. It did include port wine and it did include Brighton. And he did regret that they lived in Putney.

Mrs. Brackett almost gave way to panic, but she had a valiant soul and the spasm passed leaving her shaken, but with her plan laid, and prepared to act upon it. She took out of the bank all the money that she had screwed together toward the passage-money to America, and

with it and Doll she departed for Brighton on the day after the doctor's last visit. This was no time for experiments or for doing things cheaply. Every pennyworth of value must be extracted from this visit; but to risk all for the sake of an extra pound a week would be lunacy. Mrs. Brackett accordingly returned to those same comfortable lodgings which had received her and Doll when they were in Brighton before. The price was not exorbitant, but it could not be called a little one. It brought, however, warm rooms, good cooking, and ungrudging service, and such things to a convalescent are beyond price.

Doll, under the influence of sunshine (April was here), sea air, nourishing food, and change of scene, improved beyond all expectation, and every day Mrs. Brackett felt less and less guilty in the matter of that voyage to America. If Doll were well, nothing else mattered. And she was getting well steadily. The money was being wisely spent. To have gone on hoarding it would have been sheer folly and wickedness. What if they could not go to America till the summer! Ah! and what if that had happened which would have prevented 'them' from going to America at all! It would have been a poor economy to save money and lose Doll.

But they would go before the summer. Once Doll should be thoroughly re-established they would set to work to save in earnest. In the course of the next month two dividends rather larger than most of them would be coming in. It only required a little still more careful management. Mrs. Brackett used to lie awake half the night searching new occasions for exhibiting prudence.

When they had been three weeks in Brighton and Mrs.

Brackett was at the height of her self-satisfaction, a letter arrived to say that the Big Bull Brewery Company (source of one of those two important dividends) had gone into liquidation. The corollary to this piece of news was that Mrs. Brackett's income was reduced by very nearly half.

CHAPTER XVI

(1)

ONE item in that list of securities which Mrs. Brackett had left with Dick Crewe, as an excuse for having come to find out if he was or was not in love with her daughter, read as follows: —

The Big Bull Brewery Company of Partington, Minn.
£500 Ordinary shares of 5 dollars each.
Yielding most years, 15 to 20%.

Against this item before returning the list upon which he had conscientiously taken the advice of a stock-broker friend on the very morning of Mrs. Brackett's visit — Dick had pencilled the words: "This interest seems rather high for safety. You should take advice in America about these shares."

To the despair, therefore, which assailed Mrs. Brackett when she received the news of this disaster was added remorse for having, with open eyes, neglected what had proved to be perfectly sound advice.

The temptation of high interest enjoys this advantage above other devils; the more dangerous it is to its victim, the more seductively does its voice sound in his ears. A man whose income is ten thousand a year can risk the loss of five hundred pounds for the fun of receiving a hundred a year for the loan of them. If the concern in which they are invested comes to grief, he may be annoyed by the circumstance for the rest of his life, but

he will not be inconvenienced for a second; he will not be obliged to deny himself the fulfilment of a single desire. But while, if his income is in the two hundreds the loss of a hundred a year will be very nearly overwhelming, the yearly receipt of the same sum, instead of, say, twenty pounds, becomes to him of almost fantastic importance. Eighty pounds a year, one pound ten shillings and ninepence a week — what does that not promise to a single person who is living on a scale where a shilling cab is a luxury and a theatre stall a wild extravagance! But when two people are to be maintained and at the same time a considerable sum of money is to be saved rapidly for a purpose which seems of vital importance, what must be the temptation to retain an investment which, if it continues to pay, as it has regularly paid for many years, will represent the difference between tolerable comfort and an unbearable and hopeless poverty! We must not forget that Doll's mother had not been brought up to keep herself and four or five children on thirty shillings a week, and an income which might be wealth to a labourer's widow must seem to Mrs. Brackett barely sufficient to defeat starvation. Nor must we forget that Mrs. Brackett came from a country where risks are regarded as a sauce to life and the bold speculator commands an admiration, almost a respect, which in England he is far from enjoying.

I, for one, do not blame her for holding on to her Big Bull Breweries. In all that concerns investment I am a very fearful man, and to possess a security which should give me twenty per cent for my money would seem to me to be directly tempting Providence to destroy me; but courage, however displayed, in other people, always

secures my esteem, and, having regard to all her circumstances, I cannot, in this instance, withhold it from Mrs. Brackett. She was undoubtedly foolish not to sell her Big Bulls and invest the proceeds at three per cent in some thoroughly Consolidated and unshakably Preferred and trebly Guaranteed Debenture Stock; but in refusing to do so she seems to me to have achieved a sort of greatness.

Whether, while Big Bulls behaved properly, she had the same opinion of herself does not matter. But it is certain that, Big Bulls having come down like a stick, she was no longer in a position to flatter herself on greatness of any kind. She was too obviously reduced to a smallness of the most definite description.

A hundred and twenty pounds a year and Doll to keep, not to mention herself! And America to be attained! And when America should be attained, how were they to live on a hundred and twenty pounds a year? In England the sum was an impossible one; in America it must be a derision.

And Doll must be taken to America, and soon.

In England she was going to die.

(2)

Mrs. Brackett faced her situation with characteristic resolution. One thing was at once perfectly clear to the poor little woman — that they must be gone from Brighton without delay. Let them thank God that her change had done Doll as much good as it had and retire to Dutney on the instant. Once there, they could sit down and consider their position with as much calm-

ness as they might be able to command; but, with the expenses of Brighton lodgings running up against them every minute, nothing of the kind was to be thought of here.

The dreadful news had so powerfully and obviously affected Mrs. Brackett that she was unable to conceal it from Doll. Its reception was the one thing that afforded a gleam of comfort to the distracted mother. Three weeks earlier Doll must have broken down altogether under it; to-day — she was so much restored — she merely laughed. It was a hard laugh, to be sure, but it told of a strengthened fibre and a renewed bodily ability to withstand misfortune. It gave Mrs. Brackett courage. But if Doll had wept, her mother would have regarded it as the beginning of the end.

"Why, mother," she said, "it does n't seem as if they *can* do very much more to us, does it? Of course I don't say they can't; but if they can, they must be pretty clever. And if things can't get any worse, there's always a sort of off chance that they may improve. Perhaps that's what's going to happen now. Perhaps we may find a big legacy waiting for us at Putney; but then again, of course, perhaps we may n't. But anyway, you're right about it's being best for us to get back there quickly. We'll pack right now. So you stand by the trunk and I'll hand you the things. When it comes to packing you're IT; but I suppose I can wash the bottles for you, and I'm going to do it."

Mrs. Brackett was too much relieved by this unhoped-for attitude of resolution to protest.

"Doll," she said as she opened their trunk — they had read the letter in their bedroom, — "if you are n't the

sweetest thing! Another girl would be wringing her hands and blaming me for not selling those shares long ago. But you know that I did it all for the best, all for your good, dear; and you just stand up and face it like a man would, and I thank you, Doll, as I thank God for giving me such a brave, wonderful child, and if you'll give me the boots, we'll put them at the bottom so your pretty things won't get hurt."

With so much and no more preliminary talk these two stout-hearted Americans set themselves to their appointed task.

Under ordinary conditions Mrs. Brackett would have devoted blissful hours to smoothing out Doll's clothes, wrapping each garment separately in tissue paper and laying them all carefully in the trunk; but now there was no leisure for that kind of self-indulgence. The packing was completed in twenty minutes.

Then the landlady had to be interviewed and bluffed, by promises of a speedy return, into permitting them to give up at once rooms which they had engaged for another week, without paying for the privilege. How fortunate it was that they had been to this house before and had thus established a sort of tradition of frequent visits to Brighton! This unscrupulous behaviour gave Mrs. Brackett one or two qualms; but she had her back to the wall and scrupulosity is the privilege of the wealthy. Still, she did not let Doll be present while she talked to the landlady.

They left without tipping the servant. It was a flight, not a departure.

(3)

When they came to Putney the rain was still falling and the fog was still heavy. It looked as if it had never done and would never do anything else but rain and be foggy. They were too poor, now, to telegraph to char-women to light fires to receive them, and so the flat was cold and dank. Soot had fallen out of the living-room chimney and lay thickly in the grate, thinly everywhere else, and floated in the air like a small fog that had been especially created for them with a specially dismal smell. As if this was not enough, a tap of the bathroom basin had not been perfectly turned off, and the plug had been left in, and for the whole of the time that they had been away, a drop had fallen every minute and a half. Consequently the floor was sodden with water and Mrs. Brackett knew that she was going to be held accountable for the ruin of a ceiling in the unoccupied flat below them. Lastly, there were no coals in the coal cupboard, Mrs. Brackett having taken Doll to Brighton in such a hurry that there had been no time to get them in. Indeed, the fact that they were precisely at the end of their supply had been one thing which had contributed to the haste of their departure.

All these discoveries had been made before the loafer, who had appeared at the cab door, had brought the trunk upstairs. Mrs. Brackett soared to the occasion.

"You come right downstairs again with me," she said to the fellow as she screwed up the dripping tap, "and carry a sack of coals up from that greengrocer's down the street. It's double money for you."

No one understood better than Mrs. Brackett the

unthrift of buying coal by the sack, but, with Doll to be warmed, economy went by the board.

She lit the oven of the gas stove and — “Doll,” she commanded as she threw a cushion on the floor, “squat you down there and roast yourself while I grapple with this coal crisis. You’re chilled to the bones, you poor thing, and you’ve got to warm yourself this very minute or we’ll be having you coughing again and that’ll about finish me. I’ll be back in next to no time with some fuel and I’ll have a cup of bouillon for you as quick as I know how.”

She was gone, driving the loafer before her.

Doll was disobedient. She took off her dress quickly, put on an old bathrobe that had not been at Brighton, hunted out a dustpan and brush and set to work to clean up the mess of soot in the living-room. This done, well enough to be going on with, she unstrapped the trunk, meaning to begin unpacking, but then she found that her mother had taken the key downstairs with her. While she was trying to think of some other useful employment, Mrs. Brackett returned, coal sack on loafer, too triumphant to notice that her orders had been flouted.

When the loafer had emptied the sack into the coal cupboard she handed him sixpence, expressing at the same time her thanks to him for having been so obliging. He put the coin in his palm, raised it to within a few inches of his right eye, examined it with great care, and said, with exaggerated politeness —

“Sixpence, if I mistyke not.”

“That’s right,” said Mrs. Brackett cheerfully; “we won’t keep you.”

“Sixpence,” he repeated, still peering at the coin.

"Well, blarst me, if this yn't my lucky day after all. Why, just before you drove up in your keb, lidy, I was parssing the remark to a friend of mine that I 'ad n't touched a copper since morning. It shows the wickedness of complaining. This 'ere's a sort of 'int to be more patient under adversity, I expect. Sixpence, lor blime! One large portmantle, seven flight of steps, one dirty coal sack, seven more flights of steps, and then — sixpence! You don't splash it about, do you? Oh, no, not at all. Corlummy! it's *pathetic*, that's what it is. Pathetirud-dick!" He raised his arms on high. "And 'ow do you suppose," he shouted, suddenly abandoning his hideous civility — "'ow do you suppose a man like me lives when he *yn't* carrying your boxes and coals for yer? Don't you think I eat? Don't you think I drink? Don't you —"

Here he stopped, for Mrs. Brackett was standing close to him, her eyes on fire and her body rigid with anger. Her finger, stretched out in a superb gesture, indicated the door.

"No," she was saying, "I don't *think* you drink. I *know* it. If you were n't drunk now you would n't dare to address me in that way. But if you think you can scare me with your violence you're as mistaken as you're beastly. Out you go! Do you hear me? Out you go and thank your lucky stars that I don't call a policeman up and give you into custody. Take your sixpence and get out of this. Out! Out! Out! I tell you."

The poor dog had actually cowered beneath the first breath of her cold and devastating fury and had given a step backwards. This had availed him nothing, for when he stopped he found her as before, just under his nose. Again he fell back, again Mrs. Brackett advanced;

again, and yet again. The end of her harangue coincided with the bang at his heels of the flat's door.

For a moment or two he stood on the landing, recovering his breath while he glowered evilly at the letter-box — he had not enough spirit further to raise his eyes.

Then he said "Yah!" and moved a foot back and up, as if he would drive in the glass.

Then he lowered his foot and laughed as scornfully as possible.

Then he put his sixpence in his pocket and shambled downstairs and out into the street.

Then he went to a public-house. Then he drank beer. Then he felt better. Then he drank more beer. Then he felt much better.

Then he drank more beer and the incident passed out of his memory by the Door that gapes for Shameful Reverses.

(4)

Mrs. Brackett came back from the passage breathing rather hard through her nostrils, but otherwise calm.

"Lamb," she said, ignoring completely what had just happened, "I want to see you down beside that gas oven. This apartment's about as cosy as an ice-chest at present, and until I have the fire started and the bath-water heated up for you good and hot I shan't know a moment's peace. So down with you and wrap this robe around you, for if you catch another cold I shall give up."

But Doll did not sit down. "I wish," she said, "that you'd let me help unpack the trunk, mother. It'll warm me most as quick as that old gas stove and I'll feel that

I'm being some kind of use to you. It's about time I began to lend you a hand; for if those shares are truly no good we have some pretty hard times coming to us. Do you suppose, mother," she enquired, casually, but with a heart that beat considerably faster than usual, "do you suppose that I could go on the Stage?"

CHAPTER XVII

(1)

MRS. BRACKETT had been born and brought up in a small Middle West city called Grover, but upon this fact she never insisted, and, preferring always to dwell upon the unimpeachable New England origin of her husband (who had hailed from Cambridge), had ended by accepting the East — accent, rigid morals, and all — so completely that it was almost impossible even for her fellow-citizens (until ancestors should have been exchanged) to believe that she was not a native of Massachusetts.

Among other prejudices with which she had burdened herself by this conduct was one against the Stage as a career for the daughters of the Well-bred and Respectable, which almost amounted, in fervour and intensity, to a Religion. Had she continued to dwell in the city of Grover there is no knowing what she might have thought about anything; but it is certain that, by allying herself with the East, she cut herself off from the possibility of preserving an open mind where the Theatre was concerned. There is no doubt, again, that had Mrs. Brackett reared her child with complete success, — that is to say in complete subjection to herself, — Doll could never have spoken the awful words which I have just recorded. But it is obvious that this was not the case. Where her mother's dominance saved her trouble or was exerted to promote her immediate pleasure, Doll could be as obedi-

ent as the most dutiful daughter imaginable; but further than this she was not prepared to go, nor, it must in fairness be admitted, did Mrs. Brackett often wish to drive her.

The prejudice against the Stage is not a prejudice of the rising generation, but of those that have risen; for while Youth's eyes see only Adventure, the eyes of Age are dreadfully aware of Peril. To Doll the Theatre seemed an easy, rapid, and amusing road to fortune; to her mother, twenty-five years older, it appeared an antechamber to Hell; and it was as certain that the beautiful Doll, faced with poverty and compelled to perceive that she was no longer able to leave everything to her mother, would sooner or later imagine herself an actress, as that Mrs. Brackett, equally convinced with their owner of the girl's physical perfections, should be ready to faint at the first hint of so horrible a proposal. And so, "Do you suppose, mother," said Doll casually, but with a beating heart, "that I could go on the Stage?"

She was prepared for opposition, — that was of course, — but not for hysterics. Yet hysterics instantly ensued. The fact is that Mrs. Brackett was in no state to sustain, immediately, any new blow. To the strain of losing nearly all her money had been added the strain of her warfare with George. To this had succeeded the misery of their life in Putney, Doll's illness, the need of spending their little hoard that they had got together against the day of departure from England, the collapse of the Big Bull Breweries, the return to the chilly flat, her anxiety for Doll, and, lastly, the conflict with the loafer. And now, just as she was making ready to lay the fire and heat the boiler and save Doll's life with hot water and a warm bed,

she was asked to contemplate the possibility of Doll's going on the Stage. It was too much.

No sooner had the shocking words been spoken than the bundle of chips fell from her hands with a crash, she sank into a chair, and passed, without so much as a preliminary exclamation, into a condition of uncontrollable grief. She wept aloud wildly, she wrung her hands, she gasped out the beginnings of words which her sobs would not let her finish. She turned up her face to the ceiling, laid her head on the back of the chair, and permitted her tears to course unchecked over her face. Then, as suddenly, she began to laugh; she drummed on the floor with her heels; she threw her arms about.

Doll was petrified for as much as a minute. Then she flung herself on her knees beside her mother, clasped the little woman in her arms, and entreated her to be quiet. She could think of nothing else to do. Possibly what she did was as good as anything that she might have done. At any rate, after a little time, Mrs. Brackett's terrible laughter ceased. Then she abandoned her convulsive movements, her sobs became less and less masterful, and, finally, her tears flowed no more. She lay sideways in her chair, shaken and exhausted by the crisis, only moaning weakly now and then, her face covered with her hands. Doll, seeing that the worst was over, removed her arms from around her mother and quietly began to pick up the scattered chips. Mrs. Brackett made no movement and her moans went on.

Doll threw all the chips into the grate, stuffed a lot of newspaper on top of them, heaped some coal over all and put a match to the paper. She was resolved to be useful.

The paper burned brightly for a few seconds while Doll stood by, admiring her own cleverness. One chip caught and crackled once. Doll nodded her head as much as to say, "Yes. That's what happens."

Suddenly the fire seemed less prosperous. The flames vanished; a thread of smoke passed up the chimney and was gone. The fire was out. Doll seized the poker, drove it between the bars and stirred vigorously. For her only encouragement some charred paper floated to the hearth.

"Mother," she said, "this fire's not doing very well and I'm as cold as charity. What do *you* think about it?"

Adversity is a good teacher and Doll was now learning things which if Ease had always attended her she might never have known. Two years ago, if the fancy (it could then only have been a fancy) to go on the Stage had taken her, while she could not have told her mother about it with less preparation, she would have done so with much less anxiety and she would have met opposition in a very different way. Hysterics from her mother would then have angered not alarmed her, and she would have persisted in the face of them, with only greater determination and a more wilful blindness to her mother's reasons for opposing her wishes. To-day, herself softened by suffering, she was able, it appears, to understand something of what her mother was feeling; and in Mrs. Brackett's grief and despair she could see, not the expression of a stupid and old-fashioned prejudice, but of a great love that knows its object threatened with disaster. It is idle to expect much sympathy from anybody who has never passed through trouble; for as the senses of the body only acquire knowledge by experience,

so do those of the soul, and the man who has never undergone misfortune is as ignorant of its real nature as is a man, blind from birth, of the real appearance of sunlight.

Doll had acquired sympathy; perhaps not a great deal, but even a little is an enormous advance upon none at all. And this new sense told her that there was but one thing to do at this time and that was to abandon the subject of the Stage at once. Her mother, she thought, could be trusted to return to it; but if that should not happen, a better moment might some day present itself. But a worse one for resuming it than the present could not be imagined.

So there was sympathy behind her request for help in the matter of the fire and there was tact; for the call to practical action was, of all others, the most likely to brace the overwrought little woman who lay moaning in her chair.

The result was excellent.

Mrs. Brackett sat up at once, dried her eyes quickly and sprang to her feet. Doll cold! In a moment she seemed herself again.

“My goodness, Doll!” she cried, as, down on her knees, she pulled out coal and burned paper and chips and set them down on top of the oven. “Whoever heard of building a fire with the kindlings at the bottom? Why, my poor child! you’ll never get a fire to start that way. Give me that newspaper and I’ll show you how to do it right.”

She, too, welcomed the chance which the fire offered of ignoring Doll’s suggestion for a little time. She was aware that she had shown weakness and was already condemning her conduct as inexcusable. This was a

thing to be faced calmly, resolutely; not with crazy gibberings and an exhibition of uncontrolled movement. Mrs. Brackett was bitterly ashamed, and the fireplace seemed a refuge — though only a momentary one — from her self and its reproaches. The more noise she was able to make as, with quite unnecessary vigour, she crumpled up paper and clattered the coal and sticks together, the less clearly did the voice of blame sound in her ears.

Doll affected an immense interest in the fire-building. She put her hand on her mother's shoulder and leaned anxiously over the grate. "I see," she said, "the paper in first; then the wood; and the coals last of all. I suppose it's because the wood won't catch unless the paper's *below* it that you do it that way. Fire always burns *upwards*, does n't it?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Brackett, with a perfectly natural laugh, "unless it's lightning; and one can't always arrange for a thunderstorm when you want the fire to catch."

The rapidity of this lady's recovery on this occasion must always exercise a strong claim on my admiration.

(2)

But however advisable they both felt it to be that Doll's words should be ignored for a time, that time could not possibly be a long one. Doll was too determined to help and too surely convinced that the Stage presented the most hopeful field for her endeavours, and Mrs. Brackett was too dismally apprehensive that her child's suggestion was founded on resolve, for the discussion to be postponed for more than a short time.

While the fire-building and the preparation of a meal and the putting of Doll to bed occupied their activities, they succeeded in staving off the inevitable; but, once they were fed and Doll had been soaked in hot water and tucked up between the blankets (Mrs. Brackett would not hear of sheets to-night), they both knew that the time had come for the reopening of the question which they both dreaded. Sleep, with this thing still ignored, must be impossible to them.

Mrs. Brackett was, as you might expect, the first to grasp their nettle.

"Doll," she said as she pushed the clothes in between the mattress and the bed-frame, "you said something just now which I never expected to hear from a daughter of mine. You asked me why you should n't go on the Stage. Do you really think that question was necessary?"

Doll put out a hand and pulled her down, so that she sat on the bed.

"Yes," she said, "I do. So we'd best have it all out right away, mother. I've got to do something. We're very poor and it's foolish for us to go on pretending that we can even live on what we've got now. You've looked after me all my life and it's about my turn to do something. But what can I do? You know very well that the answer's 'Nothing.' Why I can't even sew a seam or darn a stocking. You've been too good to me, mother, — that's what's the matter with me. You've never let me raise a hand to the smallest thing, if you could save me the trouble. Well, as things have turned out, that was unfortunate. Don't think I'm blaming you. I'm not quite so ungrateful as that. But here we are, with only about five hundred dollars a year to bless

ourselves with, and it does n't begin to be enough. I've just got to work now. And I don't know a single thing. I'm simply not useful. But I'm pretty and there's one business where good looks *are* useful, and that's —”

“I know it,” cried Mrs. Brackett, — “I know what you're going to say. But oh, lamb! it breaks my heart to think that you can ever contemplate acting. It's an awful life, a wicked, fast, horrible life. You don't know, you can't know, I could n't bear it if you did know, what the dangers of the Stage are. There are things happen there every minute that I could n't even whisper to a pure-souled girl like you. At your age I had no more notion of what goes on among theatrical people than you have now, and it's only since your father died that I've ever begun to suspect them. He kept me shielded from all knowledge of that kind and never let me join a single committee. He used to say that committees were only for unhappy folks. But when he died I became unhappy, and perhaps it was that idea of his that led me to take up Social Work for a time. Well, I could n't endure it. It was too horrible and I soon gave it up and devoted all my time to you. But my eyes had been opened and I knew things that simply can't be told. And I tell you that I'd almost rather see you dead before my eyes than acting on the Stage, with however great success. It's not the life for my girl. Believe me, lamb, it really is n't. And if you think you must do something to earn a little money and help us out, I don't say that I would try to stop you if you could light upon some respectable work. But don't let me ever hear you speak of the Stage again, for it's simply too impossible for you.”

"Well," said Doll, "but, mother, what can I do? I can't be a stenographer without learning shorthand and typewriting, and that would cost money that we have n't got. I can't be a governess, for I can hardly do simple arithmetic. I've never been to college and I've got no kind of degree or diploma, and people require some sort of proof that a governess can teach, before they'll engage her. I might be a companion to some rich old woman," — Mrs. Brackett groaned, — "or I might be a manicurist or a servant," — Mrs. Brackett winced, — "only I should n't be worth any one's money. You see," she went on, "I've been thinking it out some. I've not been just sitting around and wringing my hands ever since you heard about those Big Bulls. And I'm quite sure that the Stage is the only thing I can hope to succeed at. It seems to be the one business in which they don't require any previous experience, so long as a girl's good-looking. You've only to read almost any novel to find that out. If a girl's pretty she can earn money right off; and it seems to me as if it would be wicked in me not to try to help you that way, simply because I might be going into danger. I know what those dangers are, too; for you must n't forget that I'm no longer in my cradle, and George has n't the same ideas about shielding women from the knowledge of the world as father had. He's an Englishman —"

"Don't I know it?" moaned Mrs. Brackett.

"— And Englishmen are n't afraid of telling their wives the truth, if they want it. So, as I say, I know something about the dangers I'd have to face and they don't seem to me to be so very terrible. I may be useless, but I'm decent; and you need n't be afraid that I'll

disgrace you. But let's say no more about it to-night. We can't decide it now, anyway. So get off your things and come to bed and to-morrow you can have another try at showing me the error of my ways. Or perhaps we'll be able to think up something else for me to do. But we can't make out as we are and I'm bound to try to earn some money somehow. If you can find me something that's not the Stage, I'll gladly try it, and that's a promise. So it's up to you, mother. And now" — she yawned largely — "I'm just dead with sleep and that bath's done me a heap of good. So come to bed, like a good little mother, and let's forget all about this till to-morrow."

And Mrs. Brackett, because she had encountered a wholly unsuspected definiteness and decision in Doll's presentation of her case and was entirely unprepared with any alternative, that could be contemplated, to her proposal, allowed her entreaties, for that night, at any rate, to be stifled and went to bed to spend the long hours till dawn in preparing a set of arguments which should dispose forever of anything which Doll might be able to bring against them.

By the time she was in bed Doll was asleep; for she knew herself possessed of an argument against which those of her mother could never prevail.

Her mind was made up.

(3)

Doll slept soundly all night and woke without a trace of cold. Her mother lay awake till dawn, hardly daring to move lest she should break the healthful slumbers of

her child. Just at dawn she at last fell asleep and woke to find Doll in her dressing-gown bending over her with a cup of tea.

"I thought the water boiled," she said, "but I'm afraid it can't have, for I've put just heaps of tea in and it seems pretty poor to me. But it's hot, so drink it down, mother. And here's some bread and butter I've cut for you." She advanced some chunky slices on a plate.

"Doll," said Mrs. Brackett, "you're the most naughty girl. Think of your getting up in the cold that way and making breakfast so slyly! But I'm glad to have it and it was like you to do it. You boiled the water on the gas ring, did n't you? I'll be along and lay the fire as soon as I'm through with this fine tea you've made."

"Listen!" said Doll.

Mrs. Brackett obeyed her and faint crackling became audible in the living-room.

"You've never started that fire?" cried her mother. "Well, if that is n't wonderful!" she went on as Doll nodded proudly — "and if you are n't the most practical creature ever! I must see that fire," she said, suddenly putting her cup down, leaping out of bed, and running into the living-room. She was back in a moment. "I could n't have done it better myself," she cried as she came in. "It's a fire anybody might be proud of. And don't let me ever hear you say again that you're useless, lamb."

Doll laughed in enjoyment of her small triumph, and proceeded to dress.

Mrs. Brackett took her breakfast.

Neither spoke for a long time. They were collecting

their forces for the struggle which they both knew must very soon be resumed.

The arguments for and against the adoption of the Stage as a means of livelihood by a young and beautiful woman are so well known that it could only be a weariness for us to report any more of the conversation of these two people relating to this subject. Had either of them convinced the other, the undertaking might be worth our while; for where a settled determination is opposed by a well-grounded prejudice, any victory, by argument, which either may obtain must be almost as remarkable as that would be which might be gained in the contest between the irresistible force and the immovable object of tradition. The settlement of the question depended solely upon the power of Doll's will to combat that of her mother. In the last resort she could always walk out of the flat and take an engagement, supposing she could find one; and Mrs. Brackett was physically impotent to stop her. In short, Doll had the ace of trumps and could be certain of taking the last trick, though she should lose every other. Mrs. Brackett's task was to induce her to refrain from playing the ace.

But the known impossibility of convincing any one against his will never prevented an argument yet, because the hope must always be present that the will may be won over; and the rule held good in this case.

Mrs. Brackett used every weapon in her armoury. She appealed to Doll's affection, to her sense of duty, to her principles, moral and religious, to her fears, to her birth and position in Society; she wept, she prayed, she stormed, she commanded, she threatened, she fawned, she was contemptuous. She endeavoured to curdle her child's

blood with stories gleaned during her short period of Social Work. She painted the perils of the Stage Door and the Front Row of the Stalls in lurid colours, with reference to the histories of at least half a dozen young women. She spoke of those Fiends who masquerade as Actor-Managers, those Harpies who wear the guise of middle-aged actresses.

She declared that Doll's health would never stand the strain of stage life.

I suppose there was only one thing which she did not do, and that was to cast any doubt upon the certainty of Doll's securing an engagement. She refrained from doing this, not because she feared to wound Doll's vanity, but simply because it seemed perfectly obvious to her that Doll had only to stand up and say, 'I want to act,' to have all the managers in Europe and America cutting one another's throats to obtain her.

To all that her mother said Doll replied, in effect: "I must do something. I can do nothing. The Stage is the only place where a chance offers. Therefore I must go on the Stage."

At last Mrs. Brackett found herself forced back upon an argument which had suddenly come to her in the night watches and which had then seemed to have been directly vouchsafed by Heaven. If she had not used it hitherto, it was because, while, during the night, it had seemed unanswerable, it had, when examined in the light of day, been found to have lost a good deal of its force.

"But, Doll," she said, "why do you say that you must do something? It is n't necessary at all. I'm a skilled masseuse. I can earn money that way, can't I? Of course,

I have n't any certificate,— I shall never forgive myself for not taking one when I could have had it for the asking,— but that does n't matter very much. I can show what I can do. And it will only be a little time before I'll be making enough to keep us both in comfort. I'll go out this minute and call on some of the doctors round here."

Doll had not interrupted her; now she spoke.

"Yes, mother," she said, "that's a pretty good idea and I think you should try it. But it does n't affect what I mean to do at all. You can't hope to jump into a paying connection straightaway. You say yourself that it'll take a little time. Well, it may take quite a long one. And meanwhile where are we? And do you think that I'm going to sit around here reading *The Sketch* while you trail all over London in search of work? No, ma'am. That's not the rôle I've got to play in this piece — why, I'm talking like an actress already! — and if you can *mass*, I guess I can act. Why, mother, — just imagine. In a day or two I may be in an engagement at ten pounds a week" — Doll owed all her knowledge of the theatre to the pages of *Romance* — "and all our troubles may be over. Think of it! Fifty dollars a week. It would be luxury for us. And you would n't have to *mass* either. And I don't *want* you to work. You've done enough. All my life you've spoiled me and cared for me, and now it's up to me to spoil you and care for you awhile. And I can only do it one way."

Mrs. Brackett threw up her hands. She came down to sheer temporizing.

"Well," she implored, "don't do it to-day, lamb. Don't do it to-day. We've got enough ready money to

last us a month or so, and meanwhile we may be able to think up something else that you can do. Give me a week. Give me three days. If it's only to try to get accustomed to the idea, Doll."

This was victory, and Doll did not abuse it.

"Very well, mother," she said, "it's three days then. I'll do nothing for three days. But it's only wasting them, because we'll never find anything that I can do except that. Never! I know it. My face is my fortune, and I have n't another cent."

CHAPTER XVIII

(1)

THIS is a story of mother-love grown crooked or of selfishness that has cunningly clothed itself in the beauty of mother-love; I am not sure which.

He is a bold man who will confidently undertake to declare the foundations of any single piece of human conduct. How much less is he to be trusted who professes in one word to explain a long series of connected actions. In Mrs. Brackett's case we may be sure that both mother-love and selfishness were present, but I, for one, am not prepared to say which of them predominated. I am by no means sure that mother-love, though it be the purest, is anything in reality but a peculiarly disarming form of egoism. But upon this enquiry, fascinating though it is, we need not embark. We have, obviously, not to do, here, with that species of the passion. It is enough if we agree that Mrs. Brackett's worship of her child was considerably alloyed with jealousy, which is only one kind of selfishness.

The effect of confusion becomes greatly strengthened when we consider, as we have now to do, the next performance of this tragic little figure.

It would occur to few of us, I hope, to stir up trouble between an adored child and her husband who adores her, simply because we cannot make up our minds to take the second place in that child's life. We should, like Mrs. Brackett, persuade ourselves, with more or

less success, that our conduct is guided by the single clean desire to ward off sorrow from the beloved object. Such conduct in another must, at any rate, seem to us deplorable. But when we are confronted with the spectacle (which now confronts us) of a mother proposing to save her daughter from the possible contaminations of the Stage by plunging her headlong in the slime of the Divorce Court, we must be quite at a loss for words to describe either the conception or its ruling principle. Have we mother-love here? Or is it selfishness? Or is it plain lunacy, induced at last by the long-continued strain of warring passions?

I confess that I do not know.

Perhaps you will come to some conclusion in the matter when you are, as I am now, in possession of the facts; and, until that time, we may let the problem alone.

Listen then to this.

(2)

When two days had passed, Mrs. Brackett was in despair. She had advanced her position not one inch. Doll was still determined to become an actress and no alternative (save posing to painters, which was not even to be mentioned) had been discovered by her mother's toiling mind. It was true. Doll could 'do' nothing, and for her to learn 'anything' would cost money which they did not have. Only on the Stage could she lay out her one gift with immediate profit. And it was clear that Doll must 'do something.'

Mrs. Brackett had called at the houses of twenty-seven doctors. Of these she had spoken with eighteen; of

these eighteen only five had seemed to care whether she could or could not skilfully massage the bodies of patients; of these five only two had given her any hope of employment; and of these two neither had offered her work.

She had no certificate. Now, few doctors have either the time or the inclination to put to the test a *masseuse* who is not provided with any credentials but her own assertion that she is capable, and when that *masseuse* speaks with an American accent Insular Suspicion whispers at the ear.

Mrs. Brackett had gained nothing by her weary travels through Putney, Wandsworth, and Barnes.

From her own endeavours she had, therefore, very little to hope. Nor could she conceal this from Doll. She returned to the flat at the end of the second day, so utterly dispirited, so physically exhausted, that a blind man could have seen that she had achieved nothing. Doll was too kind to triumph, but too sure that she herself was right to refrain from improving the occasion.

"Yes, mother," she said, "I suppose you can try again to-morrow, but on Thursday *I'm* going to see the managers."

To this Mrs. Brackett said nothing. In silence she took off her soaked boots, stockings, and skirt, in silence put on a dressing-gown and slippers, and in silence lit the gas ring to boil their eggs for supper. For the moment she seemed empty of resource, collapsed, hopeless. On Thursday Doll was going to see the managers. On Friday Doll — Doll Brackett — would be an actress. It seemed to be the end of the world.

Doll was quite cheerful. Only another day separated her from action. She was very sorry that her mother was so tired and depressed, but there was not the slightest cause for depression. Quite soon she, Doll, would be earning ten pounds a week, perhaps twenty — the lean days were almost over.

She ate her egg voraciously and a great deal of bread and butter. Her appetite was excellent. She drank three cups of coffee, for she had no fear of not sleeping to-night. Things were settled.

Her life might be smashed, her happiness might be gone forever, but she was going to 'do something.' The horrors of idleness were no longer hers to face. Very sensibly she reached out towards the good that was to come and determinedly refused to mourn for that which was gone.

The collapse of the Big Bull Breweries was, no doubt, a misfortune for a great number of people, but Doll was not among them.

Supper over, she insisted on washing the plates and cups and Mrs. Brackett was too crushed to dispute the point. Seated before the fire, her head in her hands, she abandoned herself, poor soul, to her thoughts. In the kitchen Doll, clicking and rattling the crockery, hummed a tune. If her mother had not been lost to all sense of her environment this one circumstance must have cheered her; for it was long since Doll had hummed. But Mrs. Brackett was deaf to the happy little sound, as she had been blind to the change that had come over Doll's expression in the past two days. On Thursday Doll was going to see the managers. There was no help for it.

(3)

Her Doll — an actress.

She sat up, clenched her hands till the nails wounded the palms, and, with wide eyes, stared into the fire, as if there she sought some last desperate means of averting this unthinkable disaster.

Her thoughts turned darkly upon George March, the source of all their calamities.

Her little girl — her Little Doll That Came Alive!

Her thoughts flew back to the years of Doll's babyhood. Once again she held the tiny creature in her arms, gave it the breast, bathed it and dried it, hanging over it, breathless before the miracle of this life that she had given, worshipping the delicate beauty of the little body, hushed it to sleep, adoring the small clutched hands, her ear close to its face listening to the light breathing as to the music of Paradise.

Over again, in minutes, she lived years.

Again she saw the gradual transformation, each day more marvellous, of the baby into the child, saw Doll creep, stagger to her feet, run confidently on sturdy legs. The child became a little girl, the little girl a young girl. Her baby curls lengthened, were 'bobbed,' grew again, more thickly, more beautifully than before, flowed down over her shoulders, were confined in a 'horse tail,' mounted high upon her head whose shapely character now first became manifest to the world. Her dresses shortened and lengthened out marvellously — it was to Mrs. Brackett as if these rapid variations in the beloved figure took place before her eyes. First the long rich baby-robés, then the little dress of the one-year-old,

then the small child's absurd, brief tunic, halfway to the knees, with a skirt hardly bigger than a broad frill. Then the beloved legs began to vanish as each added year claimed more and more reserve in their display.

Suddenly Doll seemed to stand before her as she had seen her, for one minute, on her eighteenth birthday. Always they were away from home on Doll's birthday, for in September, in which month it fell, New York is still deserted by every one who can afford to escape its deadly heat.

This time they were in New Hampshire, staying in a small, quiet, summer hotel that cooled itself among the thick woods of pine and maple that clothe the spurs of Mount Monadnock. They had arrived on the evening before the birthday, after a long, tiring journey from the beach hotel in Maine where they had spent July and August.

Mrs. Brackett, having wakened Doll, given her her birthday presents (bought long ago in New York and hidden according to custom, among the contents of the mother's trunk), brushed her hair, and dressed her, had sent her off to begin breakfast while she, Mrs. Brackett, finished the toilet which her eagerness to see Doll's pleasure in her gifts had (as happened every year) interrupted. Five minutes later she came down into the hall, and, finding that breakfast had not yet been served, went out into the porch where she expected Doll was to be found.

It was one of those fabulous mountain mornings with which America furnishes her autumns as some recompense for her generally abominable climate. There had been a light frost about dawn, and the air in the shade

of the porch was so cool and clear that it seemed unfitted for the use of earthly lungs. Outside the sun was blazing in a sky of purest blue, in which a few soft clouds floated high and motionless.

On the steps stood Doll, chattering to a youth of no importance. She was clad from neck to foot in blouse and skirt of spotless white drill, plainly but exquisitely made and perfectly laundered. Her little feet were shod exquisitely (always everything of Doll's was exquisite) in shoes of white buckskin. Her hair seemed a glory about her face, only less dazzling than the sun above her. The clean air had given her cheeks a brighter colour and her eyes a clearer beauty than Mrs. Brackett had yet seen there that summer. She stood beside a tall white pillar (than which she seemed more slender and more straight) round which grew a creeper, laden with scarlet blossoms. Behind her great Mount Monadnock trembled faintly into the blue. Over her head was poised a busy humming-bird.

The coals into which Mrs. Brackett was staring, shifted and settled with a little crash and the beatific vision vanished, but she did not move. Her thoughts were already busy with other voyages which she had made with Doll into lands much farther from New York than Mount Monadnock. Italy, Provence, Spain, Dalmatia, Algiers, — where had they not been in response to the girl's eager desire to see the world, to ransack the corners of this great playbox that Providence had cast at her feet? — Mexico, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Austria, Germany.

Mrs. Brackett's face, which these happy memories had wonderfully softened, grew dark. Germany! Munich!

The Bavarian Alps! What was it that made these names so ominous? Ah! George March!

George March!

Again the nails bit into her palms and in a moment she was embarked on a fresh and sinister series of recollections.

That fatal night at the *Regina*! The imbecile critic who had brought him up to them. And that still more fatal journey through the lakes and mountains, from *Königsee* by *Partenkirchen* to *Oberammergau*. *Oberammergau*! Detested place — scene of the culmination of that fatal courtship.

Again Mrs. Brackett woke up in the hammock under the trees of the *St. Gregor Landhaus*; again she came back to the consciousness of shadow and warmth and the tinkling of a brook; again she saw Doll's face leaning over her and again the news which she had dreaded yet desired (for Doll loved him and in those days Mrs. Brackett had never known a rival) — again the news was proclaimed. "Mother, wake up, and congratulate this young man. We want your blessing, mother."

With that her thoughts sprang — as if they could not face the intermediary stages — to the drawing-room at *The Lawn* and that bitter scene when George cast off the last semblance of decency and bade Doll choose between them. And again she heard Doll's voice saying —

O God! to think that this should have happened to her girl! Her little Doll! Her lamb! Broken under the harrow of that man's avarice and pride — broken without help; no chance of piecing together the poor shreds of happiness which had been left to her. Tied to him without remedy till his death or hers should release her.

The coward! To refuse her her liberty as he had done.

But if he had granted it, what might not her freedom have offered to Doll? Still young, always lovely, and with the right of the divorce case on her side, a really happy second marriage might have been hers. Yes, Mrs. Brackett felt that she would have wished Doll to marry again. Without marriage a girl's life was a failure, and no mother worth the name could wish her child not to enjoy the fullest existence that should be possible to her, and that second marriage was waiting for her.

Sir Richard Crewe! An Englishman, to be sure, but rich, chivalrous, handsome (a perfect contrast to Doll), of really good birth, no mere lawyer's son (Mrs. Brackett had never learned to distinguish the two branches of the English legal profession), and utterly in love, all he asked of life was to be allowed to make Doll his own. After a decent interval the marriage could have been celebrated quietly, Doll would have at once taken that place in the best English Society to which her beauty and upbringing naturally entitled her, and the terrible mistake of her marriage with George March would have become a matter of almost no moment at all.

And George March forbade all this. Nothing but the life of that cur stood between Doll and the realisation of all these advantages. Crewe was there, waiting and eager. And a street accident, a neglected cold, might at any moment make it possible. But street accidents don't happen like that; people like George March did n't neglect their colds.

I think that, if Mrs. Brackett could have killed George by an act of volition, George would have died that evening.

It was monstrous, unbelievable, that all Doll's chance of future happiness should depend upon the life of a man so healthy as was George March. Monstrous! And there was nothing to be done, nothing at all. Doll must go on in all this squalor and misery, neither wife nor widow, until Providence should see fit to remove her husband from the face of the earth which he polluted. But George March would live. And Crewe might not wait.

And Doll was going on Thursday to see the managers.

Suddenly Mrs. Brackett started to her feet; then, as quickly, sat down again. "My God!" she whispered, "if Doll would only do it!"

(4)

She glanced stealthily behind her towards the door; across the little passage Doll could be seen, with the sleeves of her blouse rolled up in a most business-like way, polishing plates for her life in the kitchen.

Mrs. Brackett watched her for a full minute before she turned once more to the fire and resumed her study of the red coals, and until Doll came back into the room, she sat there, quite still, staring, staring, while her lips moved silently as if she framed arguments and made calculations.

According to custom she brushed Doll's hair out, massaged her face, and helped her to undress. All this she did with hardly a word. Doll did not invite conversation, for their talk during the past two days had been all on one subject of which she was very tired. She, too, was busy with her thoughts, for she was contrasting the merits of the various London theatres. Should she

appear, first, at His Majesty's or the Haymarket or the St. James's? Or, since she had no experience, would it be better to make her *début* at some house less prominent than these, say the Criterion or the Lyric? It was a matter not lightly to be decided. Well, she had all to-morrow to think about it and her mother's hair-brushing was making her very sleepy, as it always did. Better to think no more of theatres and managers to-night; better to give oneself up to the soothing influence of the brush.

Mrs. Brackett promised to follow Doll to bed in a minute. She had just one note to write and mail.

But Doll was asleep long before that letter was posted. For while it was only long enough to be called a note, it had taken as much time to write as five ordinary letters.

CHAPTER XIX

(1)

NEXT morning Mrs. Brackett did not go out in search of work. This surprised Doll, who had not expected her determined little mother to be so quickly discouraged. Never before had Mrs. Brackett been known by Doll to abandon a project without having first made every effort in her power to bring it to the desired conclusion; as a 'quitter' she appeared in an entirely new light. This unusual conduct gave Doll to hope that her mother had become either reconciled to the idea of the Stage adventure or convinced that it was futile any longer to oppose it. With ten pounds coming in every week there would, of course, be no need for Mrs. Brackett to earn money by massage. Doll, however, asked no questions, nor did she return to the subject of The Theatre, for there was an air about her mother as she moved through the flat, a sort of furtive restlessness, which made her think that possibly neither of these explanations might be the true one. She was soon to find that in this she was right.

About ten o'clock there came the double knock at the door which proclaims a servant of the Post-Office. Mrs. Brackett hastened out of the bedroom where they were making up the bed — Doll had insisted on helping in this work — and returned with a telegram, opened, in her hand. Her face was paler than usual.

"What's the bad news now?" asked Doll, affecting to jest, but really smitten with terror. A telegram is

always a little portentous, though to people who enjoy ordinary prosperity its appearance is not actually alarming. But when it is received by one whose luck seems forever to have deserted him, it has power to shake him to the soul.

Mrs. Brackett tried to speak, but could not, tried again, and again failed. She moistened her lips with her tongue and looked at Doll with a strange, haunted kind of stare. Doll assumed that some colossal disaster had taken place.

"What is it?" she gasped. "Can't you speak, mother?"

Mrs. Brackett put the telegram into her hand in silence and Doll read:—

Delighted to come to tea this afternoon.

CREWE.

The relief was so great that she almost burst into tears. Instead she laughed and — "But that's great, mother. It will be ever so nice to see him. We don't seem to have spoken to a soul but one another in an age. Won't you make milk toast for tea? It might interest Sir Richard."

"Doll!" said Mrs. Brackett, and her voice was ghastly. "Don't talk that way. You don't know why he's coming. You can't."

Again the thrill of fear passed through Doll.

"But why *should n't* he be coming?" she cried.

"Sit down," said her mother, suddenly and fiercely. "I've got something to say to you. Something that must be said before Sir Richard comes."

Doll, obeying her as a machine might have done, took the nearest chair, a straight-backed, thoroughly uncomfortable one. No action could more plainly have shown

how much she was disturbed, for the bed was not far away. "Well?" she asked.

Mrs. Brackett walked once or twice nervously across the room and back again. Then she halted and spoke. Her thin hands, held low, writhed slowly together.

(2)

"Doll," she said, "there's no use in blinking the fact that we've made a mess of things. I ought to say that *I* have, for it was my duty to guard my child and I'm a good deal to blame for what's happened. You thought you were in love with George March. No," she went on hurriedly, for Doll had made a small movement that seemed to express dissent, "don't interrupt me now, dear, because what I've got to say is n't easy, and I want to have all my wits about me if I'm going to say it right. And I repeat that you thought you were in love with George. You were blinded, as girls are when they're in that state, and you could n't look at things in a calm, unprejudiced way. But I was n't in love, and I ought to have been able to look ahead of us, and I ought to have understood the real character of this man you wanted to marry. I was too anxious for my girl's happiness. I was blinded in a way, too, for ever since you were a baby I've never been able to deny you anything, and the mere fact that you wanted George made it seem impossible that you should n't have him. It made me see him in a light that I would n't have if you had n't cared for him. I don't say I could or I could n't have seen the real nature of George, but I ought to have tried harder than I did. But I wanted to think well of him, and, of course, when

a man's trying to win a girl he's apt to make the very best of himself. I don't think I'm altogether guilty, Doll, but, that apart, the fact remains that we made a mistake.

"Well, we know what's come of it. Here you are parted from him —"

"Oh, mother," cried Doll, "you don't mean that you want me to go back to him?" She half rose. Her face flushed and her eyes grew big and very bright.

Mrs. Brackett read those signs in her own way.

"You don't think," she exclaimed, "that I could so much as suggest such a thing? After the way he's treated you — us?"

Doll sank back in her chair. "Go on," she said, — "go on, mother. I won't interrupt you again."

"Well," Mrs. Brackett resumed, "you know how we're fixed. You're neither wife nor widow. There's George living up at that Hampstead house in luxury, and here are you getting along as best you can, in this dingy little place, with hardly enough money to buy you bread to eat. It's true that George has offered to pay you an income, but I guess we are n't down to accepting his charity yet. His offer was only a fresh insult to you.

"Well, is this a tolerable position? I say it is n't. You're young and lovely and healthy and eager for life, and all that life can give you. There's nothing you could n't do and no kind of full, splendid existence that you could not lead, if you were n't tied to George March. It seems to me that the solution's a simple one. Cut the knot that holds you together and each go your own way to make the best of what life has still to offer to you. In America we'd do it as a matter of course. In America

two people who find they've made a mistake of this kind don't have to spend the rest of their days longing for one another to die, so they can set to work and try to be happy again. But this is England, where they can only do things according to the ideas which prevailed about a thousand years ago. And in England it's not possible for two unfortunate creatures to get away from one another unless one or the other of them can be proved to have done certain things which no decent person can think of doing. That's how it is here. Incompatibility of Temperament does n't go in this country. I don't say that the society of Reno is the sweetest in the world, but that place is just a symptom of the broader view which we take of these matters in America, and there's many a wretched couple that's been thankful to God that Reno exists to help them get away from one another. But here in England it can't be done without starting a fearful scandal; and it seems to me that, if that's the case, no right-thinking man would hesitate to incur the blame, which one of the parties to a case must take, rather than compel his wife to do it or go on living in the miserable state that you're in, Doll. But that's not the way George looks at it. Yes,"—for Doll had uttered a little cry,—“I've had this out with him. I saw him the day after you left him and put it to him, straight and plain, that his duty was to let you divorce him, let you bring against him the accusations that the English law says must be brought, and to allow the case to be decided in your favour without defending it. And if he had an ounce of real chivalry in his whole body he'd have seen it the way I did, and perhaps, by now, you might be free altogether, unless the law over here works

as slowly as everything else. But would he do it? He would not. I forget what he said. I don't want to remember it. But it was mean, mean, mean. That man's just made up of selfishness. He refused, and that's all that's necessary for me to say about it."

She paused for breath. She had made her first point. Perhaps she wished to hear how Doll would receive this one before she went on any further. But Doll said nothing. Only her eyes burned yet more brightly, her colour was yet deeper, and her breathing had become a little difficult. Mrs. Brackett found that she must continue without guidance.

"Very well," she said, "that's how it is. George refuses to make any arrangement of the kind I've mentioned,— they call it a collusive action, I think,— and I don't propose to ask him again because I know that it would be useless. But, Doll, that's not the only way out."

Again she paused. Still Doll was silent.

"Sir Richard Crewe," said Mrs. Brackett. "You like him, don't you?"

Doll nodded. She seemed resolved not to speak.

"I thought so," said her mother; "well, do you know that he just worships the ground you tread on?"

Doll shook her head.

"Well, he does."

Doll remained immovable.

"If you could come to care for him, Doll," said her mother slowly, "it might solve all our difficulties."

At last Doll spoke. Her voice was rather hard, but beyond this Mrs. Brackett could detect nothing to cause her anxiety.

"Don't go beating about the bush any longer, mother," she said. "What are you trying to propose?"

"Doll," cried Mrs. Brackett. "You know I love you. You know I would n't advise you to do anything that I did n't truly believe was for your good. We've got to look things in the face, Doll, and we've got to see what's best to be done, having regard to all our circumstances — One thing only is certain — we can't go on this way. It's not possible. We have n't enough money for decent food and lodging, and we've either got to work for our living or starve or find some third way out.

"And, Doll, it'll kill me if you become an actress. I could n't bear it. I should look on you as a disgraced woman. Don't think I'd give you up. I could never do that, whatever you did; but I should simply die. I could n't live on to see my girl mixed up in that dreadful, wicked, godless life. And I believe I'd rather see you dead.

"But it is n't necessary for you to be an actress. There's Sir Richard. He's just waiting for you. He's just living by the hope that you may some day be free and that he may be able to ask you to be his wife. And if you were free, would n't it be exactly the very best thing that you could do? He's rich; he's a gentleman; and he'd make you a wonderful, good, and devoted husband. Even if you don't love him now, you'd soon learn to do so. And you've tried love, Doll, and see what it's brought you! And Doll, as his wife, you'd be removed above the reach of all worry and anxiety. He's not dependent on what he does for his income. He's no artist. He's a solid proposition, and I want my lamb to build up her future happiness on just that kind of a foundation. For where there's no sure money there's no sure

happiness, whatever clergyman and woolly-headed idealists may say. I know it. I've tried awhile longer than you, Doll, and I've seen that it's always so — that when money flies away, happiness runs off after it about as quick as it knows how. Look at me. Do you think I've been happy since I lost my money and ceased to be able to spend it on you? For it's not the money that's good, Doll, — it's what one can do with it. And unless one can do things and express one's nature as it's intended to be expressed, happiness is n't anywhere in the picture.

"And I tell you that in Sir Richard lies your best chance of happiness. He's English, I know, but he's not like most Englishmen. And I hate to think of you going back to America as you are. It'd be like a confession of failure, and my Doll's never had to confess to a failure before this. I could n't meet the people we know at home, — we could never find happiness over there, — and it seems to me as if you've got to stay in England, for a long while, at any rate. And if you married Crewe you could put America right behind you and set to work building up a new life and a new happiness for yourself in England. That's how I look at it."

Again she paused, gathering force for the ultimate attack.

"And how," said Doll, — her voice was harder than before, but still there was nothing in it to give Mrs. Brackett serious cause for alarm, — "and how do you suggest that I should marry Sir Richard Crewe if George won't do as you asked him? Do you want me to run away with Sir Richard and let George divorce *me*?"

"Oh, my dear," cried Mrs. Brackett, "it's too dreadful to hear you say it, but — well —"

Doll sprang suddenly to her feet and confronted her mother, towering over her. "Is that what you mean?" she demanded harshly. "*Is it? Is it?*" Her eyes were blazing.

Mrs. Brackett's heart sank, but she had gone too far to turn back. "Why, Doll," she said, "don't excite yourself that way. I'm proposing nothing that I'd be ashamed to have you do. I'll go with you. I'll be along. It'll be just a form that you'll have to go through in order to force George's hand. He can't refuse to act if you openly go away with Crewe. And I'll make everything all right with Crewe. He shall understand the situation absolutely, that I'm to be with you, *always*, until the divorce is granted, and that what we do is merely to seem to act in conformity with what the law — Ah!" she screamed, cowering away and putting up her hands over her head, "*don't* look at me like that, Doll. Don't do it, my darling. I can't bear it if you glare at me that way."

"Infamy!" whispered Doll as if to herself. "Infamy! Oh, my God, to think she should think that I — Oh!"

She ceased abruptly and stood staring at her mother with the same wondering, disgusted look (as at some strange and rather repulsive creature) that had extorted the cry of despair with which Mrs. Brackett had closed her case.

"So this," she said at last, "was what had to be said before Sir Richard came. Sir Richard! You've arranged this with him."

"No, Doll, no!" Mrs. Brackett wailed, "truly I have n't. He knows nothing about it. Not one single last thing. I only asked him to look round this afternoon, so that —"

"I see," said Doll, "so that you might lose no time.

So that, once I'd been persuaded to do what you'd planned, we might begin on him right away to get him where we wanted him and have everything comfortable and easy for us again. You could n't wait even a day to sell me into shame."

"Doll," screamed her mother, "if you say that I'll go crazy! Don't you see that it's your saying you'd go on the Stage that's made me think of this? Can't you believe that I'd rather see you married happily to him than —"

"Happily!" Doll retorted. "Happily! With Sir Richard Crewe! You think I could be happy with Sir Richard after — OH!" she cried passionately, "is there any wickedness that a girl can do on the Stage that can come up to this that you suggest? I'll say nothing about your plan to get George to let me divorce him. That was bad enough. But this — this is — why, it's just sickening! To trap a decent man like Sir Richard Crewe and drag him through the Divorce Court, just so that we may get out of *this*" — she waved her hand round their poor little room — "and eat five courses at dinner once more. Is that the way you'd have me try to begin learning to love him? To start by hating oneself seems to me a poor way of looking for love. You don't know the first thing about love! It's not a thing that one can learn. It comes of itself — and when you've *lost* it — Here!" she cried, "I must get out of this — I can't stay in this room just now. Where's my hat? Oh, where's my hat? If I don't get some fresh air, I shall choke."

She had already torn open the door of the cupboard in which their hats were kept and had taken out the first hat that she could find. At once she was pinning the

thing to her head without the slightest discretion and was dragging her boots out from under the dressing-table. Upon them she fell to work, lacing them swiftly and silently. Her mother could do nothing but stand afar off, wringing her hands.

Doll sprang to her feet, snatched an overcoat from a hanger, pulled it on, caught up some gloves, and turned towards the door. She found her mother in her path.

"You shan't go like this," gasped Mrs. Brackett. "You shan't."

"Stand out of the way, mother," Doll commanded. I've got to go out. "I can't breathe in this horrible place just now."

"No, Doll, no!"

"Yes, I say."

Mrs. Brackett was swept aside. The hall door banged. The girl was gone.

The wretched mother uttered a wild little cry and fell prostrate upon the half-made bed, her face buried in the pillow and her hands clenched upon the folds of the counterpane.

Outside in the street a barrel-organ began to play an inspiring two-step.

CHAPTER XX

(1)

THE history of George since the day of Mrs. Brackett's last visit to his house is soon told.

I have said that in hard work he had been wise enough to see his salvation, but that he had found it easier to perceive the value of work to him than to do it. He was not the first, nor will he be the last, man to have this experience.

But resolution can overcome most difficulties, and in George's case it did not fail. He set his teeth hard, forced himself to stand before his easel, compelled his hand to mix paint and lay it on to canvas. For some days he did execrably, but as the fierce pain of his loss became deadened by its very continuance and his hot rage at the cause of it faded slowly into a smouldering hate, his artistic side gradually reasserted itself, and something of the old pleasure of achievement came back to him. He began sometimes to find that he had been interested in what he had just been doing; he began now and then to catch himself considering the result of a series of strokes with the exultation that recognises success. Work, healer of men, had him in its care, and he was benefiting by the treatment.

Still, by the half-hour, he would stand staring vacantly at his canvas, but as the days and weeks wore on, these unprofitable intervals became fewer and more widely separated. Yet always, even when his concentration

upon his painting was at its strongest, he was aware of an aching sense of loss; nor was his chosen anodyne ever so completely master of his pain that he could forget its cause.

It is quite clear to me that he did not wish to forget it. At any rate, the poor devil had never banished from his studio the most potent existing stimulus to his misery, I mean his picture of Doll; and if oblivion was his aim, this conduct was strangely unsuitable to it.

But though he seemed to cling to her presence in his studio, the memories of her which the rest of the house recalled became every day more difficult to bear. In the first week he had taken to sleeping in a little room on the ground floor at the back, a place intended by the architect of the house for butlers; and thus made it unnecessary for him ever to look upon the door of the two connected rooms upstairs where he and Doll had slept. Doll's he closed up when he made the change and its two door keys he locked away somewhere in a drawer. Next he deserted the dining-room and caused his meals to be brought to him in the studio, as he had generally done in the days before his marriage. The drawing-room he never entered at all. Indeed, it was not long before he spent his whole time, when indoors, between the studio and his dingy little bedroom, and never went anywhere else at all. But at last the hall (with its hat-stand where she used to drop her umbrella as she came in, and the long mirror in which she had always surveyed herself swiftly from head to foot as she went out) became, like the rest of the house, unendurable, and the exterior of the building, synchronously, the subject of his hate.

If he had not had a great deal to do at this time I dare say he would have given up The Lawn sooner than he did; but his work occupied so much of his time that he had no leisure in which to contemplate a proceeding so embarrassing to a busy painter as a removal. But with his first leisure the idea was released from its lair in the recesses of his subconsciousness, and he knew that he could no longer live in The Lawn. As Luck had willed it, his old house had all this time remained vacant. He was aware of this, for he not infrequently passed, in his walks, along the road where it stood. I suppose it was not more than ten minutes after his discovery that he was in the office of the agent who had the disposal of it.

A week later he was installed — an unparalleled performance.

While gradually abandoning the greater part of The Lawn he had found the need of fewer servants. First he had dispensed with Clara, then with the housemaid, and for some time he had been at the untempered mercy of his cook. He detested the woman, but she was there; and from the thought of engaging a new one he shrank appalled. The honest body soon discovered this circumstance and used her advantage to the full. To any lightest criticism of her work she replied by a plain hint at departure, and with this weapon she always won the victory, which she would then proceed to abuse. George lived like a brute beast during those evil days, but he could never pluck up his courage to discharge his tyrant. While he was moving into his old home, however, the thought came to him one day, as he stood in the midst of a chaos out of which at some future date his dining-

room hoped to evolve itself, that the place would never seem right without Mary Bates. And instantly he had said to his soul, 'And why not *get* Mary Bates?'

With the arrival of this master-thought, his departure, running, for the Post-Office coincided so nearly that they may be said to have been simultaneous.

The reply to his telegram arrived two hours later. Mary Bates announced the immediate sale of her boarding establishment in Broadstairs and her subsequent re-entry into his service. This so heartened George that he up and gave his cook notice without an instant's delay. She, having acquired much gold in his service and being rendered thereby independent of labour for some considerable time, went upstairs, packed her boxes, and departed secretly in a cab while George was exulting on the Heath. He returned to a house, purged indeed of her presence, but at the same time totally un-equipped with menials. He was so delighted with the first discovery that the second was powerless to disturb him. He repaired once more to the Post-Office, despatched a telegram urging Mary to hasten, wrote her a letter to the same effect, and dined at the Jack Straw's Castle Inn, where he had resolved to feed until Mary should appear. As for his house he proposed to let it look after itself until the same blissful event should take place. A man can live in his studio and bedroom for a long time without the help of a woman's duster.

But the caprice of Fortune, who can never be trusted for two seconds together either to caress or to bully, decreed that it should not be a long time. A successor to Mary in the boarding-house was provided within a week after it had been put in the hands of the agents, and not

only a successor, but one who was in a hurry and disposed to regard favourably all that she found on the premises, even to the wall-papers. As for the furniture, it appeared to be exactly what she most desired to buy. Against these circumstances the procrastination of no house agent could have struggled successfully, and a week later the whole business was concluded.

Next day — it was 17th of March — began the second reign of Bates the Benign.

(2)

Fortune, having beaten George to the earth and having, either in pity or in scorn, thrown him the two favours of his old house and housekeeper, now thought fit to play a really first-rate practical joke upon him.

One morning the post brought him a letter from a firm of solicitors which informed him that he was legatee to the extent of five thousand pounds under the will of the late Robert Anstruther, tea-merchant of the City of London, "as some small token," to quote the words of that instrument, "of my gratitude to the said George March for the melancholy pleasure which I have derived from the portrait of my dear daughter Rosalie Margaret, painted by the said George March in the year before the death of my said daughter."

Now Mr. Anstruther had already paid George a hundred guineas for the thing. And so, unless we assume that he had been insane when he made this legacy, there can be no explanation of his conduct which reasonable people like ourselves can accept but that which I have suggested, namely, that Fortune, or Providence, or what

you will, had arranged the whole thing in order to cast George back into the pit of despair out of which he was trying so hard to climb.

For observe, that had this happened six months earlier George's debts would have all been paid off and Doll could have had her motor-car in the garage at The Lawn, all without the necessity of selling five shillings' worth of George's precious securities. And it is probable that George would still have been at The Lawn and that Doll's bedroom would not have been locked up.

I say it is probable, for one never can be sure of these things.

But this much is certain, that George, on opening and reading this letter, would not have uttered a cry of misery and thrown that bit of paper on the floor and stamped on it — as he did. Nor would he, later in the same morning, have taken his penknife and cut to ribbons an oil sketch which he had made, at his own request, for his own delight, of the particularly ugly face of the late Robert Anstruther — as he did — or burn them — as he did.

Such ingratitude is clear evidence of madness; and madness either remains or passes away. George, being a man of essentially sound mind, this particular ebullition of the disease took the second course, and a few days later George received a second letter from the legal advisers of the late Anstruther which informed him that his legacy would be paid into his account at the bank which he had named as soon as the preliminaries necessary in these affairs should have been accomplished.

For George had acted (as you might expect him to do) upon that wise principle which forbids us to cut off our noses in order to spite our faces. This money had come

too late to prevent Doll from leaving him; but it had not come too late to pay his debts. And he very much wanted to pay his debts.

Long before he had done so, he had learned to be very sorry that he had sliced up old Anstruther's head and burned it on the studio fire; which made yet another little point to Providence, always economical of effort and always careful in the matter of by-products.

(3)

All this time the portrait of Dick Crewe had remained in the state in which it had witnessed the departure from The Lawn of Doll and her mother. In the first days of George's anguish he could bear nobody near him but Otis Gardner, whose calm presence affected him like a cool hand upon a fevered brow. Hilda he would not see; her sympathy was a little too evidently vitiated by her anger against Doll; nor did he ask his mother to come to him or propose to go to her. The society of a man's relatives is not necessarily what he most wants in times of great affliction. Otis, a comparative stranger, supplied exactly the kind of companionship that this poor fellow needed. George did not want to talk about Doll; he did not want to feel that the person with whom he was talking burned with a desire to sympathise with him; still less to be aware of a restraint which that person was putting upon his or her desire to explode into denunciations of his wife.

In the company of Otis he felt no apprehensions of this kind. The good American would arrive in the racing-car each morning about eleven o'clock, sit down in the studio, take a cigarette and begin to talk to him as if nothing

whatever had happened. He might speak of a play that he and Hilda had seen the night before, or a picture-show they had visited at some gallery; or he might talk about American sport; or he might tell stories of which he suddenly discovered an endless repertoire. Nor was he in the least careful as to their morality; so long as he could make George laugh he was content, though the Angel that kept his record might weep as it piled up the debit score.

Meanwhile George would pretend to work; but sooner or later he would give up the, at that period, useless effort and would allow himself to be put into his ulster and led to the little, low, big-nosed machine that waited for them at the front door. Then Otis would pilot them out of London into Buckinghamshire, and once free of houses and traffic, would open his throttle and hurl them across the Chilterns. Great prospects and high speed, these are the best medicines for a wounded soul; and Otis, good lad, hugged himself as the miles fled away beneath them and the haggard look on his friend's face vanished under the compelling influences of the journey and the colour crept steadily into his white skin. They hardly spoke to one another. Sometimes, as they swung over a crest, George might deliver himself of a fervent "My God!" and wave his arm over the bare hills and wooded valleys that rolled suddenly, beneath his gaze, sea-like, into the blue distance; and sometimes Otis, shaving a hen, might remark, "Keep smiling, sister"; but beyond these exclamations, the low hum of the engines and the rush of the wind in their ears alone disturbed their silence.

And by the time that the fog and rain set in the racing-car was no longer needed. George was painting again, and Otis, continuing to be wise, withdrew his society

little by little, leaving Work to complete what Idleness had begun. But he never ceased altogether to keep his eye warily upon his brother-in-law, and had he perceived any serious threats of a relapse it is quite certain that George would have done some very muddy motoring through some very dirty weather.

And so the moment came when George conceived a desire to complete the portrait of Dick Crewe. He looked upon this, rightly, as a good symptom, and without a moment's delay wrote to Dick appointing an hour for the next sitting.

Dick replied regretting that he could n't come, but failing to suggest any other time.

(4)

At first George was hurt. It seemed to him unfriendly of Dick to show so little eagerness to come and see him. Then it occurred to him that perhaps Dick had thought that he, George, had fancied that he, Dick, would expect the portrait to be continued and would be annoyed if it were not, and that he, George, had accordingly invited him, Dick, out of civility rather than from any wish to proceed with the work. People in George's condition of mind are very good at making these fine-drawn deductions from their friends' conduct, but the result of them is generally less flattering to those friends' goodness of heart than was this one.

Forthwith he wrote a second letter to Dick in which he protested his anxiety not only to see him, but to finish the portrait, too, and begged him to say which earliest day and hour would suit him for their next sitting.

To this Dick replied that he was very busy just then with one thing and another, but that he would try to let George know, one of these next days, when he could come.

On receiving this letter George's face grew very black. Here was a pretty kind of friend. "By God!" said George, "if he'd been as I am, do you think I'd have let anything stop me from going to see him the minute he let me know he wanted me? No, by God!" He threw Dick's letter in the fire and thrust it down among the coals with a vicious dig of the poker. With the action he cut Dick off from the number of his friends.

If he had known the real reason that kept Dick from the studio he would have been very much more surprised than by his apparent discovery of his friend's heartlessness.

He took Dick's half-painted portrait, scraped it down, and made such use of it as chance directed. He would not even pay Dick the compliment of slitting him and burning him. I think he used the canvas for the sketch which he did, one Sunday morning, at Mrs. Ridgway's house in North End, of her prize West Highland terriers, Fingal and Ossian. But it may have been another.

You are now in possession of the principal incidents of George's wifeless winter. Let them stand against a background of hard work, perpetual but for certain periods, more or less long, of heavy, brooding, inability to do anything at all, during which he struggled fiercely and always victoriously against the temptation to drink whiskey to excess.

And with this we may leave him for a time and turn, if you please, to still more cheerless matters.

CHAPTER XXI

(1)

DOLL ran out of the flat-building into the bright sun of a fine April morning. The air was warm and full of the essential vitality of the spring. Buds were on all the chestnuts, the almond trees were in blossom, small birds were setting up house in the shrubs. But Doll hastened along the pleasant suburban road with no consciousness of these things. In her heart it was all winter; here the chilly fog and rain of the past months again seemed to exert their deadly influences. Shivering she moved through the hot sunlight, her collar pulled up round her throat. She was cold, cold.

This thing which her mother had proposed — it was simply horrible. A sort of cold-blooded, respectable, safeguarded, chaperoned elopement, that would force George's hand by compelling him to sue for divorce. For a woman to run away from a husband she hated with a man she loved was, at any rate, an act that could be defended. It possessed certain quite admirable features. Passion, hate, courage, self-sacrifice, these were all to be found in such a story. It might be immoral, but it might also be noble, to fly in the face of convention like that and risk everything, rather than go on living a lie for the sake of being permitted to exchange bows with one's fellow parishioners. But this, this that her mother wanted her to do; what was it? To sell oneself, to a man one did not love, in exchange for a comfortable house, fine clothes,

good food, and the other things which make up the sum of material happiness. To sell oneself and, like a cautious tradesman, not to 'deliver the goods' until payment. In this bargain not a moment's credit was to be allowed the purchaser. Let Crewe 'pay,' let him free her from George, let him marry her and settle as much upon her as she could screw out of him, and then she would be prepared to 'deliver.' And not till then.

And meanwhile her mother — her mother, O God! — was to stand by with hands raised in benediction of her enterprise and every faculty alert to frustrate any attempt of their victim to anticipate the day of settlement.

And it was this that was to save her from the 'contamination' of the Stage! This crime of them both against Crewe, this pander-work of her mother's, this sin against her own love for George, this concatenation of all the infamies, was to keep her unspotted from the 'vicious society' of actresses and the 'satyr-like attentions' of their managers.

"Oh, my Heavens!" cried the poor thing aloud, "what a filthy world it is!"

Some one was speaking to her and a hand was on her arm. Returning to a perception of her surroundings, she became aware of a small woman with a round body and a kind face, who peered up at her through spectacles with eyes in which the tears of easy sympathy already stood.

"My dear," she was saying, "whatever is the matter? You're not yourself, I'm sure you're not. Can I do anything to help?"

Doll stared at her for a moment, and then, "Have you got a daughter?" she asked.

"Alas, no," said the other. "I was never married."

"Ah!" said Doll. "Is that so? Well, you can thank God about it to-night when you say your prayers. Most likely it's kept you from doing things that He might n't approve."

"My dear, my dear," cried the little woman in a shocked voice. "You must n't talk so wildly. Come! tell me what I can do to help."

"I guess," — said Doll, her fretted nerves suddenly giving way, — "I guess the best thing you can do to help is just to go right along and mind your own affairs."

She thrust the amiable little woman aside and hurried away.

The good creature, having acted on impulse rather than principle, stood looking doubtfully after her, as she hastened along the pavement.

"Dear, dear," said the little woman half aloud, "what a very incivil young person, to be sure. But she's evidently much overwrought. I really think I ought to — I really believe it's my duty — But after all, what could I do? And she's evidently not in serious want of money or she would have asked me for it. Perhaps I'd better do nothing. Perhaps she stands in need of Other Help than human. Perhaps . . ."

(2)

Doll came to Putney Bridge, crossed the river and turned eastwards. She neither noticed nor cared where she went; rapid movement seemed to be the only necessity of her existence. She presented, in fact, the highly ludicrous and diverting spectacle of a girl trying to run away from her own thoughts.

One thing the rapid exercise did for her; it warmed her blood, chilled by the horror which she had felt as thoroughly as if she had been sheathed suddenly in ice. Soon she began to feel not only warm but hot, not only hot but tired, not only tired but footsore.

A chafed toe can bring its owner to a realisation of her surroundings as easily as an amiably disposed amateur philanthropist. Doll stopped and looked about her.

It is not wonderful that she found herself in a place that was quite unknown to her, a long thin square of expensive-looking houses with a long thin garden down the middle of it. A respectable place as any on earth, but it filled Doll with terror, as any place must do if we cannot say how we have reached it. For this is to cut at the bindings of sanity, since to lose a link in the chain of our past experiences is momentarily to call our very identity into question. If we do not know how we have got 'here,' how can we be certain that the person who is 'here' is 'us' at all?

For the moment Doll had only one overmastering desire — to know where she was.

A tall, fat, well-dressed man was coming towards her. She dashed up to him. "Where am I?" she gasped.

He surveyed her with the eye of a connoisseur in such things. Then he raised his hat and replied with a fascinating leer, "In the presence, madam, of one of your most ardent admirers."

Doll shrank back.

"Oh!" she said, and turning, fled from him down the side of the square.

"Well, I'm damned!" he observed, and setting his hat a little more jauntily than before upon his half-bald head,

he moved heavily away. He was beyond adventures that promised to be strenuous.

Doll ran out of the square and came into a busy road where omnibuses were passing at the rate of about ten a minute. She sought its name on a corner and learned that she was in Knightsbridge. Then she recognised the top of Sloane Street, and at once her strange fear left her; again she was in complete possession of her identity.

(3)

Now she perceived that she was faint with hunger and weariness. A tea-shop presented itself and she went in, ordered some coffee, a roll, and an egg, and leaned back in her seat against the wall, too tired even to think. The food was brought to her and she ate it gladly; called for another roll and another cup of coffee; and while she ate she resolutely strove not to consider what she must do. That would be for a little later. Out under the trees of Hyde Park she would sit down and grapple with her problem.

She asked for her bill and, as she spoke, realised that she had come away from the flat without any money whatever.

It was months since she had carried a purse; the small sums of which she and her mother had the disposal, from time to time, were always in Mrs. Brackett's keeping; and as Doll never went anywhere without her mother, she had got quite out of the habit of paying for things.

In a first-rate restaurant the disaster which had overtaken Doll can easily be turned into a sort of triumph. If the manager is summoned and taken frankly into the

confidence of the client, it is long odds that there will be no trouble at all. It pays the big restaurant better to risk losing the price of a meal than the favour of a possible habitué. Credit is readily extended and the diner leaves the place amidst smiles and bows, with the conviction of his own importance enormously strengthened.

In a branch bun-shop (of a Limited Liability Company) they regard these things differently. Where dividends are paid out of small profits and quick and many returns, the loss of a sixpence is of more importance than that one out of ten thousand casual customers should be offended. But even here any one who is well dressed and keeps his head and asks for the Fountain of Authority may hope to come off happily.

Now, Doll was not well dressed. Women who are situated as were she and her mother do not put on their best clothes in order to do their house-work. On the contrary, they keep them, very accurately folded, and packed in tissue paper, on the shelves of their wardrobes. Doll had been wearing, when Dick's telegram arrived, an old blouse and skirt which the expensive Doll of a year earlier would not have "been seen dead in." They had been ripe for discarding when she had left George, and if her more farseeing mother had not packed them with her other things, she would never have taken them away with her at all. Since that time they had had hard wear.

Her best overcoat, which she had worn down to Brighton and back, had been put away carefully on their return, and the coat which Doll had caught up before making her escape from the Putney flat had been another relic of more prosperous days and had hung from a

peg in the hall. The boots, too, which she was wearing were not only old, but were thickly covered with the mud which the sun had not yet banished from the streets through which she had lately walked. Nor were her gloves, picked up in a hurry (they lay now by her plate), the gloves of Opulence. As for her hat, it was a very simple one, and though its lines were exquisite these were not sufficiently obvious to counteract the impression of her other deficiencies. And it had been carelessly put on over hair that had not been arranged to meet the public eye. Doll was by no means well dressed.

Nor did she keep her head. A year earlier she would have done so to a certainty; but of late she had known poverty and the calm assurance of the rich was no longer at her command.

She uttered a little despairing sound. "Oh, me!" she said, and turned very pale. And she clasped her hands convulsively together.

Four or five people at the neighbouring tables turned their heads curiously and stared at her. The waitress paused in the act of writing the check and regarded her with a suspicious glance. It seemed as if the very air of the place had surprised Doll's secret and spread it instantly abroad.

The waitress completed the check and placed it with unnecessary emphasis in front of Doll. Then she moved away and could be seen conferring with the manageress, who nodded and went across to the cashier's box by the door, where she said a few words, and, unmistakably, indicated Doll. The cashier peered through the glass and her eyes encountered Doll's. Then she went on with her endless task of giving change and filing checks;

but more alertly than before. She scented the prospect of a break in the monotony of existence and was already strung up to enjoy it to the full.

Doll had already behaved in precisely the fashion which the personnel of the bun-shop supposed would be the most certain to be adopted by any young woman who should aspire to obtain a free meal. The little cry, the despairing exclamation, the clasping of the hands—these, in their eyes, were no more than carefully designed, probably rehearsed, preliminaries. They awaited her next move in complete confidence. Even now the anaemic cashier was looking through the door to see if there was a policeman handy. Such people, whose whole life is a struggle to make a shilling do the work of eighteen-pence, are the last who are likely to be able to distinguish between the artifices of Guilt and the embarrassment of Honesty. Doll's old clothes and untidy hair blinded them to the possibility of her being in any way worthy of confidence.

Having done her innocent best to arouse the suspicions of her enemies, Doll hastened to confirm them.

The waitress had transferred the responsibilities of the affair to the manageress, and now moved among the tables, methodically whisking crumbs on to the floor, taking orders, and writing checks; not without an eye to Doll, in whose future she took an interest, fainter, perhaps, but of the same kind as that which may have stimulated a young woman of Rome while watching some Christian for whose blood the lions ravened behind their bars.

It was easy for Doll to catch that vigilant eye. She beckoned, and the girl, avid for the spectacle, came with

cruel deliberation to her side. When our pleasures are few we try, by restraining our eagerness, to make them last.

"I'm afraid," said Doll, "that I've no money with me. I am so very sorry. Do you think I can pay another time? I could — Ah!" She had been going to say that she could return during the afternoon. She had been thinking that she had only to go back to Putney and get the money from her mother.

And at once the small, if vexatious, crisis in which she was involved by her inability to pay for her lunch, was swamped and blotted out of her thoughts by the immensity of the problem with which she found herself confronted.

Could she go back to her mother at all?

It was a question which she had never even asked herself. All her faculties had hitherto been occupied with the horror that she had felt at her mother's proposal, and she had reached Knightsbridge, how she did not know, and eaten the food of this shop, without having once considered whether return to such a mother was possible. And here was this question suddenly thundering at her ear, while she endeavoured to apologise for being unable to find a few coppers to settle her bill for an egg. Small wonder if she faltered in her speech and sank back in her place with a gasp.

The waitress, with sophisticated stare, estimated an unpractised swindler.

"That's very unfortunate, is n't it?" she said rudely. "Perhaps I'd better call the manageress."

Doll made no answer. She was not thinking about her bill any longer. Her eyes were blank, her expression

silly. The waitress unerringly read the signs of guilt that knows itself unmasked.

"Miss Hobbs," she called, "this way, please."

The manageress had been ready for several minutes. Almost before the waitress had spoken she was on her way, and next moment she stood before Doll's table.

"What's the matter here?" she enquired, civilly enough.

If manageresses did not have a little more intelligence than waitresses they would not be managing them.

At the neighbouring tables people were craning their necks to see and talking about Doll to one another. But Doll saw none of this. She was not even aware that the manageress was waiting for her answer.

"What is it, Miss Delancey?" asked the manageress impatiently.

"The lady's lost her purse, I think," said the waitress with a giggle.

"Ah!" said the manageress and her eyes became hard.

Doll thought, "I can't go back to her. I can't ever see her again. What a horrible thing to want me to do! I would n't have believed it if —"

She heard somebody saying loudly and distinctly: "Are you sure you've lost it, madam? May n't you have dropped it on the floor, perhaps." Then followed an order. "Have a look under the table, Miss Delancey." She was aware of somebody who knelt by her side and poked about near her feet. All at once she realised what was happening and the great question receded under the impulse of the more immediate trouble.

Her eyes returned from the ends of the earth, that is to say from the Putney flat, and encountered those of

the manageress. "Where do you think you lost the purse, madam?" enquired that persistent person.

At last Doll found words.

"I have n't lost it," she said. "I did n't bring it along"; and her vicinity knew that she was an American. The knowledge made it no more favourably inclined towards her, for everywhere the foreigner in difficulties is at a disadvantage compared with the native.

"Oh!" said the manageress sarcastically, "you did n't bring it along, did n't you?" She felt that she had an audience and the tone of her voice declared an intention to play her scene for their entertainment.

"That's so," said Doll, "but —"

"Ah!" said the manageress with a certain monotony of method; "that's so, is it?" As far as she could see this young woman had nothing about her that could be left in pledge of the price of her luncheon. No earrings were in her ears, no umbrella stood in the rack beside her; her very hatpins were valueless. Her exquisitely tended ringless hands were evidence against rather than for her.

"I'm afraid," said the manageress, abandoning humour for business, "that I must ask you to pay for what you've had before you leave the restaurant."

"But," cried Doll, "I can't. I have n't any money."

By this time everybody in the place had discovered that an event, worthy of notice, was happening. Certain persons whose vision pillars obstructed had left their tables and come out on to the floor. Doll, casting a hunted glance round her, saw nothing but eyes that observed her curiously. A flood of colour rushed into her cheeks and she made a movement as if to rise.

"No," said the manageress, "don't trouble to do that. It's useless."

"But," cried Doll hotly, "don't I tell you —"

"I'm not concerned," said the manageress, "with what you are prepared to tell me. There's your check. Pay for what you've had and I won't dream of troubling you for explanations."

Again she looked round for approval.

"Well?" she asked, for Doll had made no reply. "What are we to do? Suppose you give me your address. Perhaps you're on the 'phone, or if you're not, perhaps I might ring up one of your friends that is."

"I have n't got any friends," cried Doll wildly, for the Greater Question had returned, demanding its answer. "I have n't got any address. At least I don't believe I have. I don't know. I've got to think about it. Oh! how can I think with you worrying me like this?"

"Well," said the manageress again, "I dare say it's very inconsiderate of me, but my business is n't to find an address for you. I want the money for what you've had. Have n't you anything in the way of jewellery that you can leave here until you can bring the money?"

Doll could bear no more. She buried her face in her hands and fairly burst out crying; and with that, the excitement in the restaurant became colossal. It is not every day that a girl, as lovely as Doll, bursts out crying for the entertainment of the public.

Those who were present had, inevitably, formed themselves into two parties. The first composed of respectable citizens who had a right comprehension of the sacredness of property, to wit, eggs and coffee and rolls,

and who could not patiently endure the thought of such things being consumed by a young woman who was unable to pay for them. The second included the weak-minded, pitiful folk who, simply and regardless of any moral considerations, cannot bear to see a girl in tears, the revolutionary characters who think human life of more importance than dividends, and similarly foolish or dangerous persons who are found sprinkled, mercifully in not too generous a measure, throughout every accidental concourse of men and women.

The first class was by this time expressing its indignation after its own fashion — “Scandalous!” it was telling itself. “An old dodge. Barefaced, I call it. I hope they’ll prosecute.”

The second class was moved to speech by its own sentiments as follows. “Oh, dear, she’s crying now. These damned companies have no bowels of compassion. You can see she was driven to it; starving, she looks” — the last a fantastic misstatement.

From among these loud-mouthed champions of mercy and apostles of the Social Revolution a shiny, shabbily gowned figure detached itself suddenly, and to the surprise and delight of every one ran across to Doll and laying a hand on her shoulder began whispering in her ear, endeavouring at the same time to force a little shabby purse into the hands which covered Doll’s face.

(4)

“There, lovey,” said the girl, who had found her pity too strong for her common sense. “There, there. Don’t cry like that, for Gawd’s sake, dearie. Just you tell me

what's the damages and I'll square the cashier for yer, if a half a crown all but tuppence'll do it."

To Doll's ear the friendly voice said a great deal more than the generous words. Here was succour at her elbow. She checked her sobs, took her hands away from her face, and looked into the eyes that, swimming with the easy tears that mark the sentimental and impulsive character, peered so closely into her own.

"There, lovey," said the girl, "that's better already. Is this your check? Yes? Right-o!" She opened her purse and with a superb gesture — perhaps she, too, was not unconscious of an audience — threw the required amount upon the table as Brennus may have thrown his sword into the scales of Rome.

"And now," she said, striking an attitude and addressing the restaurant generally in the voice of patrician languor, "perhaps the gentlemen and lydies may be allowed to finish their lunche-ons."

Some one, either in shame or admiration, cried out, "Bravo!" and there followed a small demonstration — rattling of plates, stamping of feet, a few scattered cheers and the like. And so the good public returned hastily to its cow sausages, its milk-scones, its large coffees and its small lemonades (all the honey having been extracted from the incident), lest the appetite for these things be spoiled by the gall which any further suction threatened to yield.

CHAPTER XXII

(1)

"I CAN'T thank you enough," said Doll. "But I guess I'll go now."

The restaurant being appeased, the Great Question had begun again to clamour for her notice. Her only wish, now, was to get away, whither she did not care. Anywhere would do, so long as it should be empty of curious eyes. She got up from her seat. Her rescuer did the same.

"That's right, lovey," she said. "That's right. A bit of fresh air'll do you good. So jest you come along out and hold your head up and don't you give a curse for all these blighters. I'll see you a bit of your way — that is," she added, with that real politeness which is not learned in drawing-rooms, "if you don't mind."

"Please do," said Doll. "I can't thank you, but I've got to try and I can't do it here."

"That's all right, miss," said the girl — the time for 'lovey' and 'dearie' had gone by. "But jest let me git me check in passing or we'll be in trouble agyne."

"But," said Doll as they moved away together, "have you finished your lunch?"

"Absolutely," said the girl, lying gloriously. "I was jest that moment done. You go right on and I'll foller."

She darted across the room to the table which she had lately quitted, picked up her check, bestowed one glance of humorous regret upon the half-eaten beefsteak pud-

ding which she must leave behind her, and hurried after Doll.

"Wish to Gawd it had been sandwiches," she allowed herself to murmur.

She paid her bill and joined Doll by the door. Together they passed into Knightsbridge and, without speaking, turned out of the crowd into a side street.

In Doll's hand was a little brooch, a thing of no great value, a gold bar with a few pearls on it, which, she had now had time to remember, had all this time been fastening her blouse. It had escaped the notice of the manageress because her coat had been buttoned over it.

She held it out to her friend. "I want you to have this," she said. "It's all I have to give you."

"What's that for?" cried the girl, offended.

"It's not to repay you," said Doll; "I can't ever do that. You can't know how impossible that is. I want you to keep it, to tell you that I'm grateful."

The girl's pride was instantly disarmed.

"Lord love you, miss," she said, "there ain't nothink for you to be grateful about. If we women ain't to stand by one another sometimes, it's a poor lookout. I saw you was in trouble and I *'ad* to come and see if I could n't 'elp. You'd a done the same for me, *I know.*"

"That's just it," said Doll; "I don't know that I would. Nobody else did and there were lots of women around. But you came. And you'll take this, won't you?" — she held out the brooch again — "I only wish it was better."

The girl's eyes dwelt covetously upon the pretty thing.

"Real pearls, ain't they?" she asked.

"Yes," said Doll with a laugh at the strangeness of the question. "They're real all right."

The girl took the brooch from her and examined it. "Why!" she said, "this is worth a lot."

"Is it?" said Doll; "I don't know."

"Look 'ere, miss," said the girl indignantly. "You ought n't to be out loose, that's wot you ought n't to be. 'Anding out pearls worth pounds and pounds as if they was split peas! It's awful! I won't 'ave it. And it's *my* belief — begging your pardon, miss — as you can't afford to do things like that. Now *can* you? Honest!"

"I suppose I can't," said Doll. "But it does n't matter."

"Hoh! does n't it?" cried the girl. "Well, I tell you wot. I ain't going to take it, so there. Why, you could pop this for three quid, perhaps."

"Pop it?"

"Pawn it, if you like that better. Raise money on it at Uncle's."

"Oh," said Doll, "pawn it? But I don't want — I never did such a — But," she cried, "if I *did*, I could pay you back what you lent me just now. Of course I must do that, you know."

"Well," said the girl reluctantly, "I won't say as that money is n't nothing to me, because it is. I 'ave n't got so much as I can afford to splash it about exactly." She knew that the impulse of her heart had carried her beyond the limits which her prudence habitually drew about her; and already the pleasure which her action had caused was yielding to a gloomy foreboding that to-morrow's lunch must be a very light one. And she had not finished her beefsteak pudding. And she was still very hungry.

"I can never repay your kindness," Doll went on, "but I *can* your loan. You'll let me do that, won't you?"

"Well—" said the girl. "Yes, I will. But I won't take your brooch. If there's anything but money that you think you owe me, let's call it an 'owe' and wait till we can square it the same way. P'r'aps you'll find *me* in a bad plice some day."

"It's a bargain," said Doll. "And now, how does one begin to pawn a brooch?"

The girl laughed. "Oh," she said, "*pawning's* easy enough. It's keeping the things *out* that's the trouble."

"Well, how?" Doll asked.

"You *reelly* want to do it?"

"I certainly do."

"Then," said the girl, "come this way, miss." She turned and led Doll back into Knightsbridge. They walked together for a few minutes along Brompton Road. Then the girl stopped outside a shop, the window of which was filled with miscellaneous objects. "This here man," she said, "'ll do your business as well as anybody *I* know. No," she cried, "not in there. It's down this little passage we go."

They entered a narrow, dark court which penetrated deeply into the dingy back-lands of the opulent road which they had left. A few yards along it they came to a doorway over which hung the three balls of the People's Banker.

Here the girl stopped and, laying a hand on Doll's arm, said, "You don't need to do it, miss. It's not a plice that you *ought* to go into, if you can 'elp it. P'r'aps you never may 'ave to, too. Besides, they know me in there and they'll pligh the gime with me. But they'd know

you was easy. So let me 'ave them pearls of yours and just you wite 'ere till I come back. That is, if you'll trust me."

For answer Doll put the brooch into her hand.

She darted in at the door; and Doll was left alone; and instantly the Great Question was demanding its answer. Could she go back to her mother? Could she? Could she?

(2)

The back door of a pawn-shop in the early afternoon is as good a place for the consideration of painful problems as any that can be found. It is likely to be quiet, for the business of the establishment is never really brisk until evening. The squalor of the setting offers no inducement to the attention to wander and by its very ugliness forces the thoughts within; the mind, busy with gloomy matters, finds itself in harmony with its environment. There is no sunlight to chase away despair; no fresh wind to breathe hope or consolation; here no lark sings its lie that "all's right with the world!" and "God's Heaven" is a narrow strip of dirty grey. Here the Optimist has nothing to say.

Doll, staring at a high blank wall, asked herself what she must do. Now, for the first time since the question had entered her mind, she was all alone, and, quite undistracted either by the cruelty or by the kindness of the world, was able to meet her trouble face to face.

What must she do? Could she go back?

She knew that the second question was already answered. She could never go back.

Since her babyhood Doll had known her mother for

the one human being to whom she could look quite confidently for guidance and love and help. It is true that she had never needed any of these things very much — not as she needed them to-day. But they had been there for her, if she asked for them. That the guidance had been chiefly exerted upon her choice of clothes, that the love had expressed itself nearly always in the gratification of her desires, that the help had been largely a matter of providing her with plenty of pocket-money or saving her the trouble of looking after her luggage, or otherwise providing for her comfort, — these were considerations which had never hitherto occurred to her. She had certainly never loved her mother less because Mrs. Brackett's activities in her behalf had been confined, almost exclusively, to the material plane. The girl had always accepted her rôle of the Doll That Had Come Alive, without any thought that it was possible for a daughter to enjoy any other and finer relation to her mother. All she had asked of Life had been to be petted and spoiled and made thoroughly comfortable and given everything she wanted. So long as her mother caused Life to provide these advantages, she was perfectly entitled, and extremely welcome, to steer their course as she thought best. Her advice, so long as it seconded Doll's wishes, could only be good; her care, so long as it did not hamper Doll's movements, was highly to be valued. Her sympathy had become necessary, because it was so constant that it appeared part of the natural order of things; her adoration had been so long enjoyed that it had become like the air that Doll breathed. Till to-day Doll had never conceived the possibility of breaking with her mother.

And now, without a word to warn her, something seemed to have been taken away from between them, something that could never be restored. Or it was as if she had never really seen her mother until now, as if the mother whom she had known had, always, been somebody else who had been wearing a disguise, which, once stript off, could never be worn again successfully.

Always it must reveal its wearer.

In this tender, bountiful guide to whom she had, throughout her life, submitted herself, she had, all in a moment, discovered a crafty and mercenary plotter, who, with the old words of love and care, sought to dull her ear to the horribleness of a horrible and callous scheme, which, regardless of all decency and pity, proposed for its aim the cold-blooded entrapping into marriage of a good fellow, the utter destruction of her own self-respect, and the perpetration of the ultimate wickedness against her own love. And all for money.

"Oh!" moaned poor Doll, as she leaned against the doorway and stared at the opposite wall, "why could n't I see it a little sooner? Why did I have to wait until after I'd left George and it's too late?"

Then came a kind of hope — dismal enough, indeed — to comfort her. "But she must be crazy," she thought, "to think of such a thing as that. Is that it? Has all this worry affected her mind; all this loss of her money and our poorness and then her anxiety about me and at last this Big Bull smash? Is n't that it? If I could only think it, I believe I could be almost happy; for anything's better than to have her wicked. And if it is so, if it's just that she's out of her mind with trouble and terror lest I should go on the Stage, I can't blame her and I must go right

back to her now and just be as patient and loving as I know how, until she's better. Oh! if I could only see George, he'd tell me what to do! He'd see it all the way it is and tell me what to do."

Self-reliance is not acquired in a minute, and Doll, deprived of her mother's guidance, longed, with the instinct of a dependent nature, for the only other person to whom she had ever looked for advice and help and sympathy.

"But it's too late," she thought miserably; "I can't go to George. I've cut myself off from him and he'd never forgive me. Never. I chose wrong; that's all. I chose wrong and there's no going back on that kind of choice. And," she thought, her pride giving her a sudden lash, "I'd sooner die too."

"I wonder," she said again — again despairing, "if she is crazy. But she did n't look it. Not one little bit. And it's not a *crazy* idea; it's just a wicked and vile one. She can't bear for us to be poor and she'd do anything — she'd make *me* do anything — to be rich again."

Then came the thought: "And *could n't* she make me do this? Suppose I were to go back, *could n't* she make me do it?"

Doll had fled from her mother under the single impulse of horror. Her clean soul revolted from the idea which had been presented to it, and she simply ran away as from a contamination. It was this same fear that had hitherto made her feel that she could never go back. There seemed to be something horrid in the Putney flat which she could not bring herself again to face. But until this moment it had never occurred to her that, perhaps, she could be brought to accept her mother's hateful scheme.

Doll was by no means unconscious of her mother's

power over her. In other days she had even been accustomed to make a joke of it. "What mother says goes" had always been a sort of proverb with her, her expression of the futility of imagining that any proposal of Mrs. Brackett's could be successfully combated.

And though she may not have been aware, at the time, that it was her mother who was stirring her up to revolt against the tyranny — as she believed — of George, she had long known that her fatal choice between them was the result of Mrs. Brackett's constant aggravation of her natural impatience at the economies which George imposed, rather than the inevitable issue of a grievous mistake. And if she had not hitherto blamed her mother's conduct in this sorry business, it was because she had believed that Mrs. Brackett had been inspired solely by an honest belief that George had utterly failed in his duty. But she did not any longer pretend to think that her mother had not been chiefly responsible for their flight from The Lawn.

And in the light of her recent experience, could she any longer be sure that her mother's sole inspiration had been an honest belief in George's unworthiness? One glimpse of vileness makes every action of its possessor doubtful. Might not sheer crude jealousy have been her mother's ruling principle in her conduct towards George, as a mercenary blindness to the claims of mere decency had now guided her to her choice of a means of escape from poverty? For Doll could not believe that either fear of the stage or anxiety for an adored child's welfare had driven her mother to imagine her atrocious plan. Her confidence was shaken to its roots and she was no longer able to think only the best of her mother.

And if her mother could make her leave George, what could she *not* make her do? Only since leaving him had Doll realised how much George had always meant to her, yet her love for him had vanished—or had seemed to vanish—before the persistent attacks of her mother's angry criticism as completely as if it had never been.

Might not the same thing happen again and, as her love for George had disappeared before another's persistent hostility, might not her disgust at the scheme which had been proposed to her turn in time to wearied acquiescence, under the influence of the same merciless and undeviating will?

Doll shuddered as she realised how great a tribute she paid to her mother's power by this very thought.

"I'm weak as wax in her hands," she thought. "Don't I know it? She can do what she pleases with me if she only keeps at me long enough. But she shan't do *this*. I'll starve to death before she makes me do this. If I go back, I dare n't think what may happen. Well, I may be weak when I'm with her, but I guess I'm strong enough to keep away. It's my only chance. And maybe they'll take me on the Stage."

"Oh, mother," she sighed, "why could n't you go on being good to me? You're making it terribly hard for your Doll. She's almost sorry she ever came alive at all."

(3)

She had arrived at this most useless of all possible conclusions when her friend returned from her errand. She carried one hand clenched in front of her and her eyes shone with the joy of a glorious achievement.

"Five pound fifteen and six," she announced breathlessly. "Count it. It's yours. And that's the ticket. Lumme! Five pound fifteen shillings and six blessed copper pennies. Why! you could keep a 'ole *family* for munce on it. And all for a little pearl brooch."

She put the money and the ticket into Doll's hands and cut a few steps upon the stones of the alley.

"And the best of it is," she cried, "if you'd 'a' gone in 'e'd 'a' done you in for only about 'arf. It's me that's the pawnist, ain't it? I swear I could 'ug meself, miss."

"It's been very kind of you," said Doll.

"Oh, no, it ain't," replied the girl. "It's been a blessed privilege. If you'd 'a' seen 'is fice when I 'anded them pearls over the counter. 'E did n't wonder 'ow I come by them, oh, no! And if I 'ad n't been well known to 'im for a 'ighly respectable young lidy what does a steady business with 'im year in year out, 'aving an invalid father to keep and two little sisters wot only 'ave the measles once a year and that's when they don't 'appen to be busy with 'ooing-cough or chicken-pox, and next to nothing to do it with, 'e 'd 'ave gone a good deal further into the matter. But 'e knows where I live and 'e knows as me domestic afflictions keep me there and so 'e thinks it good enough. But if you'd 'a' gone in — But 'ow I do run on! I must 'op it, and quick, too, or I'll lose me job and I'll 'ave to bring the grand piano round 'ere once again this evening."

Doll gave her what she owed her.

"I'm not going to forget our bargain," she said, "and some day I'm going to spring out and rescue you as you rescued me."

"That's all right, miss," said the girl as she put the

money carefully away. "And now I'll say au revoir, but not good-bye." She held out her hand.

"I'd like to know where I can find you again," said Doll. "Do you work near here?"

"That's right, miss. Just round the corner. I'm in the cheap stationery line; packing parcel's my speciality. There ain't much money in it, but it's regular. But I'm always to be found at this time in that blessed bun-shop of ours. Always go there when it'll run to it. It's a bit above my clarss, I know, but the vittles is 'olesome and plentiful and a girl what works as 'ard as wot I do 'as all the use she can find for nourishment. I don't 'old with cheap and nasty, and I'd always rather put me money inside me than outside as most of us poor silly girls does. 'Ence" — she struck an attitude — "these sordid rags that clothe me shivering frime. And," she concluded, "now you know w'ree to find me if you should 'appen to want me; and I should n't wonder if you would n't, too. And if you do, don't ferget that I'm wise to a lot as you've never dreamt of, and don't 'esitate to come and tell me 'ow I can 'elp. So long, miss. Ga bless yer."

She was gone and it was not till several minutes later that Doll discovered that she had not asked her name.

They never met again, for though Doll was, in the future, often to visit the bun-shop in search of her and to make enquiries after her at the pawnbroker's and at all the cheap stationers in that neighbourhood, she was not to find any trace of her. So whether her story was invented for the occasion, or whether (and more probably) the chances of life carried her away to support her ailing family in some other place, it is impossible to know.

CHAPTER XXIII

(1)

DOLL had definitely made up her mind not to go back to her mother. Her pride, which adversity had not yet destroyed or even affected, and her complete conviction that she had lost George's love, forbade her to go back to her husband. But she must go somewhere; she must do something. She was all alone now and could henceforward rely upon nobody but herself; only herself could suggest and decide upon her next step.

Luckily, perhaps, for her sanity, she was already provided with a plan. The resolution which she had found the courage to take, even against her mother's entreaties, could only be strengthened by what had occurred. That which had seemed good to her yesterday seemed even better to her now. Without any more delay she must go in search of a theatrical engagement.

How this was to be done she had already decided.

Books and magazines furnish their readers with a sort of second-hand experience. However carefully sheltered from the danger of coming into contact with actualities a young woman may be, her power to possess herself of the whole world's knowledge is limited only by her ability to obtain and understand all that has been published. Let her live bedridden in a country vicarage, and, if she can get her box regularly from Mudie's, she may assist at the discovery of uncharted rivers with as much ease as she can witness a miners' brawl in a Klondike camp or

charge with the Light Brigade over the field of death at Balaclava.

This circumstance alone explains the popularity of Fiction, where realities are reflected with that agreeable distortion which we call the Art of the Novelist. Books of History and Travel whose aim is (generally) to declare the Truth rather than to stimulate the nerve centres of the Library Subscriber, make, in consequence, a less immediate, though a more valuable, appeal to the appreciation of the public.

Doll had never read what is called a 'solid' book in her life; novels had been her only fare, but of these she had devoured great quantities in her time. While, therefore, the second-hand experience which I have mentioned was, in her case, large, it was also wholly of the agreeably distorted kind and her knowledge of what went on in this world which she inhabited (as apart from her own personal experience) was little likely to be of much practical use to her when she came to put it to any practical test.

Now, of all the Hosts of Fiction the Stage Novel is probably the least to be trusted as a Mirror of Life.

Yet Doll had no other guide than the Stage Novel to the adventure which she was about to undertake. To her the theatre was a place where every handsome and virtuous girl exchanged poverty and neglect for the worship of the public, an immense salary, and a duchess's coronet with no more delay than was necessary to enable her to win a short series of glorious and exciting victories over an abominable fellow in immaculate clothes.

While for the applause and the salary she hungered, the coronet she had her reasons for not desiring; as for the villain, she was perfectly ready for him. But in order to

get into touch with these matters, certain preliminaries had to be observed. For instance, she must get an engagement. That was the first thing to do.

No, there was something even before that. She must meet the manager who should give her the engagement.

How was she to meet a manager?

The Stage Novel told her that she had only to call at a theatre and send in her name, to be ushered at once into the presence of its master.

"Maybe," she said, — her friend had been gone some minutes and Doll still stood in the quiet pawnbroker's yard, — "maybe I'd better go down to the Strand right away. I believe the Somerset's a pretty good theatre. I'll try there. I wonder who the manager is."

(2)

She now found herself embarrassed by the money — five pounds fourteen shillings — which she held in her hand. "I must have a purse for this," she thought as she went out into the street.

A shop of the kind she needed soon appeared. She went in and asked to be shown some purses. She chose a very nice little thing in dark blue Russia leather at five and sixpence. The salesman suggested that her initial could be stamped on it in a very few minutes at the merely nominal charge of a shilling; and Doll thought this a very good idea; and it was done. Satisfied at last that her money was quite safe, she left the shop, hailed a taxicab and was driven to the Somerset Theatre, which cost her another two shillings, exclusive of the driver's tip, sixpence.

She entered the hall of the theatre and went up to the box-office. "I'd like to see your manager," she said.

The courteous young gentleman in the box-office found himself rather at a loss. The words which had proceeded from the dazzling vision that his window framed suggested that the call was a social one. No actress could have uttered them.

"Mr. Malison?" he asked, sparring for time.

"I dare say," said Doll.

She dared say! The youth did n't know what to do at all. Doll's eyes were very close.

"He's probably in the office just now," he said. "I might send up to enquire."

"That will be very kind," said Doll.

"What name shall I say?" he enquired.

"Miss Washington," said Doll. In the cab she had prepared the stage-name which she knew she would require.

"And is there any message?" he asked, prompted by his Guardian Angel.

"Why," said Doll, "only that I should like to act here."

The poor fellow passed a hand across his eyes as the realisation of his escape burst upon his understanding.

"My goodness!" he exclaimed and uttered a vacant laugh.

"It's a knock-out," he said, though he did not know that he had spoken.

"I can wait awhile," said Doll kindly, "if he's busy."

He recovered himself by a gigantic effort.

"I think," he said, always politely, "you'd better ask at the office. You'll find the door outside the theatre, round to the right." He pointed the direction.

"Oh," said Doll, offended. "Very well." She petrified him with a look and left him, mopping his brow.

Outside the theatre and round to the right. Doll obeyed her instructions. She was greatly annoyed, but she obeyed her instructions. She was prepared for a certain amount of courtesy. Her common sense told her that until she had made a name for herself she must not expect to have everything perfectly easy.

She came to a dingy opening, marked "Stage Door," outside which one or two workmen stood smoking cigarettes and chatting. They made way for her and she passed into a small vestibule where was a window like that of the box-office, only less ornate. Behind it sat a commissionnaire sorting letters which the post had just brought to the theatre. Doll addressed him.

"I'd like to see your manager," she said. "Mr. Madison, I think he's called."

The commissionnaire, whose experience was wider than that of the young gentleman in the box-office, moved not so much as an eyelid.

"Mr. Malison's not on the stage, miss," he said. "I think he's upstairs. In his office, miss."

"Well," said Doll, "will you let him know that Miss Washington would be glad to speak to him."

"I'm afraid," said the Commissionnaire, "he's too busy to come down, but if you would n't mind stepping up to the office —"

"All right," said Doll. "I don't mind. Is it this way?" She turned to ascend the stairs which led to the dressing-rooms.

"No, miss," said the Commissionnaire. "It's outside, next door to the right." He pointed.

"Oh, very well," said Doll patiently and made her exit quite unconscious of the impression which she was leaving behind her.

"Wot are we comin' to?" demanded the property man.

"Ar!" remarked the first carpenter, spitting, "you may well ask, Bill."

"Ar!" observed the artist whose duty it was to work the 'limes' on the O.P. side.

The commissionnaire went on sorting his letters.

Doll found a closed door on which was a brass plate inscribed "Offices of John Malison." Finding no one to open this door for her she pushed it, a little angrily, went in, and found herself at the bottom of a stone staircase which disappeared round a corner. To this (since there was no elevator) she set her face and for a long time climbed steadily. She reached the top breathless and indignant. Another door — this one of green baize — stood before her. Her inclination was to kick it open, but she controlled herself. She had begun to suspect that this Mr. Maddison who was 'too busy to come down to her' had better be approached more warily. If everybody had to climb all these stairs before they could see him, he must certainly think a great deal of himself.

She stood on the landing for a full minute, getting back her breath. She wished, now, that she had bought a vanity case when she bought her purse; a mirror was very much needed on this landing. In its absence she did what she could to her hair, then pushed the door open and went in.

Another vestibule. A ground-glass partition, with

another door in it and another window, marked 'Enquiries.' Right and left of her yet other doors. Behind the partition the loud click of typewriters.

She knocked on the window. The typewriters were silent and the window was raised. Doll, looking through it, saw a trim young woman sitting there, one hand upon the keys of the machine which she had been working. Farther on another girl sat before another typewriter. Her arms were in the air and she was yawning and stretching.

"Yes?" said the first of these ladies.

"I'd like to see Mr. Maddison," said Doll.

"Mr. Malison's not here," said the other. "You have n't an appointment, I think?"

"No," said Doll. "No, I have n't any appointment. But I can wait awhile."

"Mr. Oates might see you."

"Who is Mr. Oates?" asked Doll.

"Mr. Oates is Mr. Malison's representative," she was informed.

"I prefer to see Mr. Maddison," said Doll coldly. She was not accustomed to being put off with representatives. Her mother and she had always been accustomed to deal direct with the heads of the dressmaking establishments which they patronised.

"Well," said the girl, "I'm afraid you can't. Mr. Malison — not Maddison — does n't see anybody without they've got a special appointment. Shall I send your card in to Mr. Oates?"

"I have n't a card with me," said Doll, very much annoyed, but, like a wise and patient woman, making her mind up to it. "But my name is Miss Washington."

"Adah," said the chief typist, "just ask Mr. Oates if he will see Miss Washington."

The tired person in the background had begun to drag herself out of her chair when one of the doors that led into the vestibule opened and a long, lean man came out, smoking a long, lean cigar. He threw the door in the glass partition wide and said, "I want Miss Fountain's agreement, quick."

"Yes, Mr. Malison," began Adah, who had already become alert, and "Oh!" she squeaked and clapped a hand over her mouth. She was in her first week of that employment and had not become used to the ways of the place. She was bitterly angry with herself. This was as much as her job was worth.

"Why," exclaimed Doll, "they thought you were out, Mr. Mad — Mr. Malison."

He turned and looked at her; instantly realised her beauty.

"I've just come in," he explained politely. "I've another door I use. Did you want to see me?"

"Yes," said Doll charmingly, "if you're not too busy." She was upon her own ground now.

"Well, Miss —"

"Washington," said the chief typist before Doll could speak.

"Thank you, Miss Byles. Well, Miss Washington, I can spare you a few minutes. Come in here" — he held open the door through which he had made his appearance. "And I'll ring for that agreement presently, Miss Sparrow," he added to the unhappy Adah.

Doll swept into the inner room; the manager followed her; the two typists were alone together.

"Adah," said Miss Byles severely, "if you're going to hold your job here you've got to learn one or two things."

"I know," wailed Miss Sparrow. "I could have bitten off my tongue the moment I'd said it. But he came in so sudden and I did n't think. Why could n't he have rung? Do you suppose he'll sack me?"

"He oughter," said Miss Byles reflectively. "You jolly well deserve it. But I don't think he will. She's rather a beauty, you know."

"Is she?" cried Miss Sparrow eagerly; "I did n't see."

"Well," said Miss Byles. "I should n't wonder if you have another chance. Several, perhaps."

No man, they say, is a hero to his valet, but it will appear that it is quite possible for the typist to a theatrical manager to go astray in her estimation of his character.

Or perhaps Miss Byles only wished to impress her younger subordinate with the profundity of her own worldly wisdom.

(3)

The room which Doll had entered was simply furnished with a desk, some chairs, and a full-length oil portrait of Mr. Malison. The air was thick with tobacco smoke, but she was too busy trying to decide whether she ought to ask for ten or twenty pounds a week to wonder how it had got there if Mr. Malison had only just come in. If she asked for twenty, it might make him suppose that she was pretty well known on the stage and valued herself accordingly. On the other hand, there was no getting away from the fact that she had never acted

in her life, and he might ask her about her previous engagements, and she would have to confess the truth. Perhaps it would be better to say ten pounds. After all two thousand five hundred dollars a year would be quite a big income after what she and her mother —

As she forced her thoughts away from this line, Mr. Malison began to speak. He stood by the fire and looked down at Doll who had assumed the only easy-chair.

"I suppose you want to come in here?" he said.

Yes, that was what Doll wanted. "I hope," she added, "I'm not a trouble. The girl said you were very busy."

He smiled. "I don't know your name," he said. "Have you just come over? You're from New York, I think."

Yes. Doll was from New York. But she had been living in England for some time.

"Have you been playing in England?" he inquired.

No. Doll could n't say that she had done that.

"Well," he said, "with whom have you played? In America, you know."

"Mr. Malison," she said. "I'll have to tell you that I've never acted at all. This will be my first engagement."

"Well," he said, "we've all got to begin some time." But he was clearly disappointed. "You've got a beautiful face," he went on, quite dispassionately, "but have you any other reason to suppose that you can act? Can you sing at all?"

"Why," said Doll, "I don't think so. No, I can't sing. I tried one winter, but they told me I had no ear for music. It's too bad, is n't it?" she added.

"Perhaps you dance a little," he asked.

"No," she said, "I don't know that I care a great deal

about it. Of course I can waltz and do the usual things in a ballroom."

"I don't mean that," he said. "Then you've never done any skirt dancing, step dancing, in an amateur way?"

"No," said Doll. "I did n't suppose it was necessary. I want to act; not to dance."

"I suppose," he enquired, "that you know that we only do comic opera at the Somerset?"

"Why!" she exclaimed, "is that so? Well, of course, I've seen — Yes, now you tell me, I do remember that that's the sort of play they do here."

Mr. Malison laughed pleasantly. "I'm afraid, Miss Washington," he said, "that I should be no use to you. There's no room on my stage for pretty amateurs. If you'll go and learn your business and come back to me in a couple of years' time, I'll be glad, very glad to see you. With your face you can go high, if you'll work. But this theatre is n't a dramatic academy and we only employ competent artists. I've always set my face against the Beauty Who Can't Act. She's the curse of the English stage and I won't encourage her. But all managers don't think like me, and if you really mean business I'd recommend you to go and see Mr. Froude at the Siddons. He's got a new musical production coming on soon. But if you'll take my best advice, you'll give up all idea of the stage and go straight back to your mother. You'll be happier with her and *safer*, Miss Washington, much safer."

He spoke the last words in the voice with which interviews are closed and crossed over to the door — the second door of which he had spoken. Doll did not move. Surprised, he turned round to find her silently weeping.

"Oh, my God!" said Mr. Malison, smitten to the core of his very kind heart. "Oh, my great God!" he cried. "Don't cry, Miss Washington. I spoke too harshly. I'm eternally sorry, my dear Miss Washington. Please, for God's sake, don't cry, my dear child." By this time he was back at the fireplace, but Doll had already recovered herself a little. "Damn this rotten business!" he was thinking.

"Don't distress yourself, Mr. M-Malison," she said, rising; "it's not your fault. You could n't know what you were saying. But I g-guess I'll go now. I g-guess I'll be g-going along, Mr. Malison."

"Look here," he said roughly but kindly, "sit down and let's talk it all over. Perhaps I can advise you. I think you're in trouble of some kind. Sit down, my dear. Sit down."

"No," said Doll, "I'll go. I don't want to act here after what you've said. I'm no good. I can't do a thing. You said so yourself, and it's true. And I thought, maybe, I'd get fifty dollars a week." Again she wept.

Mr. Malison grew distracted. He dashed his cigar into the fender.

"Oh, my God," he cried as he strode about the room. "Oh, my dear gracious God! What a blasted life! Why the devil am I cursed with principles? Oh, my God! Oh, my God! Is there a God at all to let such things happen? Either I must eat the words of twenty years or give this poor girl a shop. And I've never done it. Never! Beauty's never beaten Talent with me yet. It's kept me a poor man for years, but I never kicked; and now that it's proved itself right I'm to throw it all over, am I? I'm to go back on the principles that have carried

me to the top, am I? I'm to be a traitor, am I? And all for this girl's pretty face. Well, if it's got to be done, it's got to be done and be damned to it! I can't stand her crying; not *her* crying. I can't and I won't. She shall have her confounded contract, confound her! By God, she shall."

Prodigiously exalted he swung round from one of his rapid turns to find the room empty but for himself.

Doll had opened the door and gone away.

Mr. Malison was taken all aback. He ran to the door, opened it, darted to the green baize door, opened it, and stood listening.

Down the stone staircase he could hear her steps. But she was no longer crying, at any rate not audibly.

For a moment or two he remained motionless with a heavy scowl on his face. Then he closed the green baize door and stole back to his room.

"An escape!" he whispered to his own portrait. "An escape, as God sees me! Such a lovely creature! An escape! But oh! this sorry trade!"

He lit a new cigar thoughtfully; then rushed into the outer office.

"Well, Miss Sparrow," he snapped, "and what about that contract?"

CHAPTER XXIV

(1)

FOR some time after Doll had left her, Mrs. Brackett lay upon her bed face downwards, too utterly overwhelmed by this, their first real quarrel, either to move or to think, conscious only of an enormous and devastating despair. Many times the wills of this mother and daughter had found themselves in conflict, but either Doll's natural laziness of mind (immensely increased as it had been by her mother's unfailing willingness to spare her every kind of trouble) or else Mrs. Brackett's infirmness of purpose where her child's desires were concerned, had caused one or the other always quickly to give way. Never before this had they had anything like a 'scene,' and the effect of the 'scene,' when it at last came, was stupendous. Mrs. Brackett went down under it like a straw hut before a tidal wave. She lived only for her love for Doll; but without Doll's love for her she could not live at all.

And she had killed Doll's love.

What was it Doll had said? "You could n't even wait a day to sell me into shame." Incredible words; but they had been spoken. It was no illusion. Doll had said them; and others of the kind — "Is there any wickedness that can come up to this that you suggest?" "You don't know the first thing about love." "I can't live in this horrible place." Doll had said things like that. Only fear, contempt, hatred expressed themselves

in such a way, and it was these which Mrs. Brackett had heard unmistakably in Doll's voice.

Perhaps the most shocking thing about Doll's reception of her proposal was its unintelligibility. Mrs. Brackett could not understand why Doll had been so horrified. That Doll would at once embrace the plan Mrs. Brackett had not expected; but she had fully counted on being able quickly to overcome any repugnance to it which the girl might feel. It had seemed to her impossible that, once Doll should comprehend that the thing was to be a mere form, that nothing 'really wrong' was contemplated, that her mother would be there to guarantee her against actual stain, she should take the sane and practical view of the plan and accept it as the only means open to them of extricating themselves from the coil which Mrs. Brackett's losses and Doll's unfortunate marriage had spun about them.

But that Doll should discover in this most necessary and desirable arrangement a sale of her 'into shame' and a crafty scheme to entrap Crewe was incomprehensible to Mrs. Brackett. By no stretch of her imagination could she perceive in marriage with so eligible a young man as Crewe a transaction of an odious character. The means to be taken to secure that marriage were certainly not those which she would have chosen for her daughter; but Doll's situation forced them upon her. And as for there being any 'plot against Crewe,' the idea seemed simply fantastic. Crewe asked for nothing better than to be so plotted against. Doll had tried marriage for love and see what had come of that! All that she was now asked to do was to follow the example of ninety-nine girls out of every hundred and marry a man who

adored her in the sure and certain hope (of her friends) that 'Love' would come to her within three months or so. Mrs. Brackett, indeed, had never for a moment considered the question from Crewe's point of view. What was Crewe after all in this American's eyes? The man, the convenience, the provider of the home and income. To serve Doll on any terms could only be a privilege to him. He was there, he would be useful, he wished to be used, Doll had need of such a person, and Doll's need was the only thing that mattered.

Why had Doll not seen all this clearly?

And so to the despair with which the poor little woman was filled by the circumstances of the dreadful breach was added a hopeless inability to understand the cause of it.

Perhaps if she had been less firmly resolved to believe that Doll had ceased to love George, she might have stood a better chance of finding a key to her enigma; but to that belief she must cling, at all hazards; for to lose it was to perceive that she had destroyed her child's happiness; and her refusal even to examine it was as much a matter of instinct as the wild beast's avoidance of poisonous fruit.

Further to lay bare the pain and bewilderment of this broken heart must be as miserable a task as it should be a superfluous one. I have worked to poor purpose if any elaboration of Mrs. Brackett's grief is necessary to your understanding of her pitiful case. Doll, consumed with wrath, terror, and contempt, had gone away and, with that, everything that needs be is said.

But a mind as active and courageous as Mrs. Brackett's cannot very long remain prostrate, even under the

most staggering blow. I dare say a couple of hours had gone by when she suddenly twisted her body round and sat up. She seemed to listen intently; then she left the bed, and going to the door of the sitting-room opened it and looked in. The room was empty.

(2)

She caught her breath and leaned against the side of the doorway. "I certainly thought I heard her," she said and her voice shook. "Not back yet? But what's she doing, then?"

Talking to oneself is generally and rightly regarded as the sign of a weak or temporarily unsettled intellect. The fact is that logical thought is a feat not easy of accomplishment without the aid of some form of articulation. Either by writing our words or speaking them we immensely facilitate the processes of our minds. For ordinary, everyday uses ordinary, everyday thoughts serve their turn well enough and may be conceived and shaped in the recesses of our brains quite satisfactorily; but let us be filled, by some unusual circumstance, with any strong emotion, — fear, admiration, sorrow, — and the words rise naturally to our lips and issue forth. Our minds are incapable of grappling alone with our thoughts and speech is called in to help; that is to say, our minds are temporarily not up to their work. So madmen, to whom any simplest logical mental process is an effort, mutter and mouth their complaints as they move along the pavement, and so those whose minds totter under the shock of violent feeling whisper their miseries or shout their enthusiasms. Thus only can

they relieve the tension within. The modern stage has gone wrong in attacking the soliloquy.

Mrs. Brackett was the least likely person to talk out loud to herself, and there can hardly be a more striking proof of the effect which her quarrel with Doll had produced in her than this simple little circumstance that she spoke her thoughts, unless it be that she was quite unaware of it.

"What's the child doing?" she asked again. "Why is n't she back home? It's 'most lunch-time now. And when she does come—I guess," she said a little wildly, "I'd best begin to fix up something for her. And it'll help the time along."

Just then she dared not face the thought of that return and of what was to be said when it should happen, and she snatched at the business of preparing food as a refuge from that thought's menace.

Soon she had the gas stove lit and a saucepan of water set on it to boil. It was pathetic to see her open a tin of sardines, the last of six which she had bought several weeks earlier, before Doll's illness, and so before the news of the Big Bull smash had raised sardines into the category of luxuries. But Doll liked sardines. You see, this luncheon was to be a sort of festivity of reconciliation. Mrs. Brackett had given up at once and forever all idea of the Crewe marriage. It was never to be mentioned again. That was the only possible course to be taken. And it was to be (if that were possible) as if it never had been proposed.

Mrs. Brackett knew that she had made a monstrous and terrible mistake, and if she had not sinned past forgiveness, it was as much as she dared to hope. To

bury the incident utterly and definitely was her only chance. Redoubled affection and care might in time blot out the memory of what had happened; but ever to do or say anything which might provoke a recurrence of the quarrel was impossible. If Doll should speak of it, she (Mrs. Brackett) must simply throw herself on the girl's mercy and beg her to forbear.

Her plan was, now, to greet Doll cheerfully and lovingly, quite ignoring the quarrel. Perhaps Doll would follow this lead. She could not wish to reopen the matter. Quite consciously Mrs. Brackett with her sardines was preparing a bait for Doll's forbearance.

She roasted and ground the coffee-berries so that there should be no delay in sitting down to table, and then, with an onion and some potatoes and a slice or two of pressed beef which were in the larder, she began to make a hash. The hash was made and cooked and Doll had not returned. The hash was dried to chips in the oven and Doll had not returned.

At last the thought which, ever since the moment when on her first recovery she had discovered that Doll was still out of doors, had been lurking just outside her consciousness, could no longer be denied admittance. It rushed in and spoke through her lips.

“If,” she breathed so softly that it seemed as though she were still trying to keep herself in ignorance of the thought which she uttered — “if she's not coming back at all!”

From the stupor into which the actual formulation of this terrible idea had cast her, she was roused, presently, by the ringing of the doorbell. She gave a little scream of delight and, running out into the hall, pulled the

door quickly open and stood, with her arms wide, glowing with anticipation, face to face with Richard Crewe.

The disappointment was so acute that she came near swooning. She clung to the door with both hands, closed her eyes and moaned.

(3)

Until Mrs. Brackett had announced to him in his own rooms the catastrophe of Doll's flight from The Lawn, Dick's Code had prevailed, though each day more hardly, against his Desire. With every incident which strengthened his suspicion that Doll was unhappy as George's wife, not only his resolution to play fair by his friend, but his friendship itself had been weakened. He could never have learned to hate George simply because he had married Doll; but it was a different story when he came to believe that George was a bad husband to her. His friendship could not stand such a strain as that. And when friendship goes, what becomes of the Code, which is, in this article of it, concerned with friendship alone? The Code takes no count of enemies or not-friends. Such people must look after themselves.

With the news that Doll had quitted George that last shred of Dick's friendship disappeared; the Code ceased to have any application to the case.

George was now an enemy whom a gentleman might endeavour to despoil of his wife without hesitation. George's name was henceforth eliminated from the discussion of the problem, which might now be considered as it affected two persons instead of, as formerly, three. But this very circumstance forced instantly upon

Dick's consideration a difficulty which he had hitherto quite overlooked.

Till this moment he had been so busy weighing the claims of his Code against those of his Passion that he had found no place in his thoughts for anything but what concerned himself alone. George and his friendship for George had been the hindrances, his desire for Doll and his duty to rescue her from a miserable existence the spurs to his will. The destruction of the barriers, which for the moment had seemed to solve the question, was found only to have presented him with a fresh problem.

It was as if a voice within him which had been urging him to beware how, to gratify his love and his pity, he delivered himself up to a future of self-scorn, was at length stilled, but only to be succeeded by another, less stern, but even harder to ignore, which prayed him to reflect before in the name of 'duty' he rescued the woman he loved from one kind of misery to plunge her forthwith into another that might well prove a worse.

This is to say that he had come to look at things from another point of view than his own — from Doll's.

So far as he only was concerned, George, no longer his friend, might be regarded as dead. So far as his own self-scorn was to be feared, he could now undertake the pursuit of Doll with a light and eager heart. For him she was already widowed, a legitimate object for his utmost endeavours.

But George was not dead, and he showed no signs of dying. As a barrier to Dick's happiness he was gone, but as a barrier to Doll's he persisted inexorably. Dick might take Doll from a husband who was dead to him;

but Doll must be taken from a husband who to her and to the World was still alive.

The World — there was the real obstacle; the World, Public Opinion, the Verdict of Society — these were the things to be dreaded. Not for himself — the Favour of Society could not weigh a feather in his scales against possession of Doll — but for Doll they were formidable, indeed.

Had these three people been cave dwellers their business would have been settled long ago. Dick would have killed George or have been killed by him. In the former event Dick would have taken Doll to himself, and the Public Opinion of the day would have applauded him for a valiant and successful person; at the same time it would have congratulated Doll upon more competent protection than she had formerly enjoyed.

But we have changed all that and the simple and honest ideas of Primitive Man are no longer good enough for us.

Seeking our own comfort and security we have placed all our clubs in the policeman's hands, and he is an exceptional man, indeed, who ever takes his own club back again. The woman who does so is lost. Society — the force behind the policeman — simply rises and crushes such a traitor to its security. Property, the Sacred Thing, has been by her endangered and the victim is offered up without delay lest The Powers be offended and misfortunes be rained upon us. "God, we thank Thee," say her respectable sisters, "that we are not as this woman" — no congratulations for her nowadays — and proceed to cut her acquaintance and forget her name.

Such being the fate of the modern wife who elects for freedom, the man who proposes to induce her to do so is impaled necessarily on the horns of a fearful dilemma. He must choose between leaving her to endure the horrors of respectable marriage and seeing her become a social pariah.

Dick had as much wordly wisdom as you might expect from a man of his position, and he knew very well that a woman who kicks over the traces in the way which we are considering is condemned to ostracism for many years if not forever; he had even seen the effects of this punishment upon more than one woman that he knew, and they had been deplorable. He knew how enormously the smile of the World contributes to the happiness of women who have enjoyed it and how bitterly they can regret its loss; how easily and how soon their freedom can appear to them to have been bought too dearly.

I need hardly say that the expedient which had seemed so simple and natural to Mrs. Brackett — I mean the collusive action with George as a complacent and abstaining defendant — had never so much as occurred to him. It was much too roundabout and convenient ever to enter the head of an honest gentleman like Dick, to whom, for a problem of so conspicuously animal a nature as that of stealing another man's wife, only an animal solution could be right. The subtleties of our civilised law seem never so revolting as when they concern themselves with things of this kind. For Dick the Law of the Jungle — Take and Hold — was here the only proper rule to apply.

But in Twentieth-Century England to decide things by the Law of the Jungle (which does not run here) in-

volves a penalty, and Doll's share of that payment must be infinitely greater than his own, so much greater, indeed, that his own might be regarded as nothing at all. To sum the matter up, he would get everything, Doll would give everything, and Doll would pay everything.

In each of us, as is well known, live, perpetually at war, a beast and an angel, and that the angel in Dick was strong to prevail is shown by the simple fact that the battle was still raging. The death of his friendship for George had been a severe disaster for the angel, and for a moment the beast had shown its teeth in a grin of triumph; but all the ingenuity is not on the wrong side, and the devil, however much we may admire him, often needs all his wits to bring himself off with a whole skin. The angel, driven back, collected his forces for another effort and discovered a new weapon in a moment. It was then that Dick, for the first time, bethought him of Doll's future, not the immediate future which should be made glorious by the sense of freedom and the recapture of passion, but that more distant one — how distant? how near? — when the chill wind of the World's contempt should bring the clouds across the sun and change the warmth of new-born hope to the bleak, ultimate misery of disillusion and despair.

And with this the beast, snarling, again gave way, to find the conflict, which it had thought all but won, renewed — and with the chances immensely increased in favour of its opponent. For now the angel had an ally which previously he had lacked — Doll.

And so Dick had never made any attempt to call on Mrs. Brackett, though he knew the address of her flat in Putney, because she had written to him from there

to thank him for his advice about her stocks without, however, fulfilling her promise to ask him to tea. But he remained in London. It is true that his friendship with George had carried him to Africa, while his solicitude for Doll's future could not do as much. But if the death of that friendship had increased the temptation, the discovery of that fear had, it seems, strengthened his power to resist. The beast and the angel were still fairly evenly matched, and his life was made no more agreeable to him than it had been.

(4)

So he got through the winter, going about his ordinary avocations, to outward appearance a not very talkative, but on the whole quite agreeable, young fellow whom no lady need to be sorry to see entering her drawing-room. He dined out, paid calls, rode in the Park, played billiards at his club, looked in at Tattersall's, hunted a little in Leicestershire, bought a motor-car and drove himself and his friends about in it, took Turkish baths, went to the theatre, attended an occasional dance, read the newspapers diligently. He smoked more than was good for him, but in early December gave up whiskey altogether. He felt that this was wise.

Of all his acquaintance Otis Gardner alone — they could not help coming across one another now and then — suspected that he was not as thoroughly satisfied with his existence as any other young man of his age who possessed a similar income and as excellent a constitution. Those who noticed in him a certain diminution of energy supposed that his mother's death had hit him

harder than one would have expected and thought all the better of him for it. Some of them cautioned him against allowing himself to get mopy or bored. He was advised to 'take up,' among other things, horse-breeding (about which he knew more than most), tulips, politics, postage-stamps. To every one of these kind advisers Dick replied that he would 'think about it.' It became a formula with him, which, whenever he used it, caused a rather grim little smile to come upon his mouth. 'Think about it!' If he could! If he could only think about anything but the one thing!

Thus Dick put the brave face upon his troubles that we have all to acquire or go under to them, and, practising patience, waited.

That was what he had 'taken up' — waiting.

Then, suddenly, on this fine April morning, came Mrs. Brackett's letter inviting him to tea.

17 MELISANDE MANSIONS,
PUTNEY, S.W.

My dear Sir Richard [it said, after stating its address] — If you can come to see us to-morrow afternoon, it will give my daughter and me very great pleasure.

Cordially,
P. BRACKETT.

(5)

Words, after all, are creatures of a very special character. The same word can be at once nothing and everything; this moment it can destroy, the next, save; it can send a world to war or lead a soul to heaven. Rob it of its context — the thoughts that surround it — and it ceases to exist. Place it aright and it can shatter empires,

If you had picked up in the street this letter of Mrs. Brackett's, you would hardly give yourself the trouble to send it to the address on the envelope. It would not seem worth your penny. A few conventional phrases conveying a civil invitation — who values things of that kind? Sir Richard could never miss it, unless he should happen not to have a note of P. Brackett's address. Perhaps this reflection might turn the scale in favour of the letter being sent to him, and if so you would think yourself foolishly generous to Sir Richard. That would be your reward.

Yet the effect upon Dick of these same conventional civilities was, actually, tremendous; for while you (picking the letter up in the street) would be ignorant of the context, Dick happened to be part of it.

The most fatal temptation of the drunkard is often, not the craving of his own body, but the voice of a friend. So long as he has only himself to fight, the war seems to be conducted on equal terms; but if the enemy calls in exterior allies, this new accession to his strength is likely to be overwhelming. It is the breaking-point. With the Flesh, the Devil, and the World all arrayed against him, the poor soul finds the odds too heavy. His only hope lies in a similar exterior alliance, and it is seldom that his fortune sends him opportunely anything of the sort. Even Luck is on the Other Side. Insidiously also he is offered, at the same moment, the fresh and alluring bait of Exterior Responsibility; he is invited to cast the blame upon somebody else, and this last subtlety rarely fails.

And so it was, now, with Richard Crewe.

Left to himself he might have succeeded in keeping his feet from the road to Doll's flat. Her mother's invita-

tion put them upon it as surely as if it had had power physically to lift him up, turn him round, set him down with his face towards Putney, and propel him irresistibly forwards. With the offer of the bait of Exterior Responsibility the breaking-point was reached.

(6)

He read the letter once and in an instant all his honest resolutions had vanished. He was no longer the true lover, holding his lady's good steadfastly before his eyes and closing his ears resolutely to the clamour of his own desire. The beast, seizing the rare chance, had leaped at his throat silencing with its exultant roar the angel's cry for mercy.

"By God!" he said as he read the letter again, "this finishes it. If she can't let me alone it's her lookout. There's a limit to everything and this is it." He went to the door and shouted for his man. By the time that person had arrived, a telegram had been written. "Here," said Dick roughly, holding it out, "take this damned thing and send it off. At once, do you hear?" He would not give himself time to think. Even so the drunkard hurries across the road in response to the voice of Sociability.

The servant took the telegram without a sign that he observed anything out of the way in his master's manner, this being one of the accomplishments which he was paid to exercise.

"Very good, sir," he said quietly and faded from the room like a shadow.

For a little time Dick sat, biting his thumb and frowning heavily. Suddenly he jumped up and ran out into

the passage. "Parker," he cried. "Parker." There was no reply. He went into the kitchen, the bedroom, the bathroom; the man was gone.

"Curse the fool!" cried Dick, and hastening into the sitting-room, flung up the window and thrust his head out. Parker was just turning the corner of the street. He vanished before Dick could call.

Again Dick ran out of the room, snatched up a hat from the table in the hall, and laid his hand upon the knob of the hall door. Then he paused. "No, by God!" he said. "No. Let it go. It's evidently *meant* to go."

I seem here to observe yet another example of the Eternal Guile; but let us not be led along the fascinating line of thought which at this point presents itself — I mean, whether the Phantasm of Necessity comes as a gift to mankind from heaven or from hell. Such an enquiry would lead us too far afield; it would involve, among many other things, a similar discussion concerning the Mirage of Free Will. Let us be content to suppose that since my Free Will declares that we shall not, it is obvious either that Necessity has decreed that my Free Will should make that choice, or else that there is no such thing as Necessity; which leaves us exactly where we were and demonstrates to admiration the value of Philosophy to keep us unhappily in the dark.

Dick telephoned for his horse to be saddled. He was in a fever to be doing something. His mind was made up and only action could keep it so. Being already clad for riding, he had no excuse, but his untouched breakfast, for remaining indoors. He sat to table and ate something or other, but it was impossible to sit still. He left the food, got his hat, and went out to meet his horse.

Once mounted, he felt a little calmer. He turned his beast towards the Park and was soon upon the tan of Rotten Row. The horse, excited by its master's excitement, set off of its own accord and they made the Circle of the Park at the limit of permitted speed. Habit alone restrained them.

When he got back to his starting-point he drew up suddenly. "This is no good," he said, as he mechanically returned the salutes of a man and his wife with whom he was acquainted. "This is no damned good to me. I've got to *move*."

"Richmond," he thought, "there's room there."

At once he turned out of Hyde Park and took the Western Road. Presently he was thundering about in Richmond Park; he drove his horse into a lather; rested it; drove it again till the poor beast became visibly distressed.

So he killed time. It was slow a-dying. By one o'clock his horse was beginning to show signs of giving out. And he was still faced with three hours of waiting before he could decently present himself at Mrs. Brackett's flat.

"Well," he said to his horse, "you've had just about enough of it, old man. So have I, but I've got to stick it a bit longer. However, that's no reason why you should kill your poor old self. Let's go and get some grub."

He left the Park, walked his horse down the hill into Richmond, descended in the yard of an inn where he had sometimes lunched, left his horse in the fatherly care of an old stableman in whom he had confidence, went into the coffee-room and ordered a meal. He surprised himself by his appetite.

With luncheon, a cigar, and a newspaper he destroyed

an hour. Then came an inspiration. He would walk to Putney. The horse was done up. He must leave it here in any case. Yes, he would walk to Putney. It would be something to do.

Three minutes later he was striding eastwards. "Thank the Lord," he said as he looked at his watch, "I told her no particular time. I should be there by three or a little after. Three's not too soon, is it?"

At Barnes, unable to endure the slow progress of walking at four and a half miles an hour, he jumped into an omnibus that overtook him. The people who were on it looked curiously at this perfectly appointed horseman who had joined their company.

It was a few minutes to three when he came to Melisande Mansions. And he had not once faltered in his resolution. His attempt to recall Parker had been the last flicker of the good that was in him. He mounted the stairs with a fast and determined step, and ran the bell of No. 17 strongly, violently.

He heard within a little glad cry and at once the door gaped and Mrs. Brackett stood on the threshold, her arms wide and her face transfigured with gladness. Next moment she seemed to collapse and, with a lamentable sound, leaned against the side of the doorway.

(7)

The transformation was terrifying.

"Good God!" cried Dick, "what on earth's the matter, Mrs. Brackett?" He caught her by the arm, kicked the door to, and supported her into the living-room. He laid her on the sofa and found a glass of water for her.

She continued to moan and moan. At such times a man grows rapidly distracted.

"For Heaven's sake," he implored her, "tell me what's wrong."

"Oh," she wailed feebly, "I am a miserable woman. I am a wicked, miserable woman. O God! give me back my girl."

"Doll!" he cried. "What is it? Where is she? Oh, please don't go on like that, my dear Mrs. Brackett. Tell me what's the matter."

"I am a wicked woman," Mrs. Brackett moaned, "and my sins have found me out." There seemed to be for her a sort of luxury in the reflection.

Dick had only the very smallest liking for Mrs. Brackett, but her distress was so terrible that his careless, kindly heart was moved to real compassion. He saw clearly that some disaster had occurred and that Doll was concerned in it; at the same time he perceived that his only chance of discovering its nature lay in calming Mrs. Brackett. He took one of her hands in both his own and stroked it soothingly and his anxiety made his voice tremble as he said: "Come, come, Mrs. Brackett. This won't do, you know. It's no good calling yourself names, you know. Just tell me what's the matter and let's see if I can't help."

"You can't help," she said dully. "Nobody can. It's all over. Everything's finished and I wish I was dead."

He put a strong restraint on himself.

"Well," he said patiently. "Tell me, won't you? Just tell me. It'll do you good, perhaps."

"Nothing can do me any good," she replied. "Nothing can ever do that again. She has left me."

He sprang up. "Left you?" he cried. "Left you, Mrs. Brackett? But why?"

"Why?" she echoed, staring up at him wildly. "You can ask that? You can?"

"Yes," he said angrily. "I can. I do. Why has she left you? What have you done that she should leave you?"

The antagonism in his voice seemed to brace her. The aggressive depths of her responded to the challenge.

"What have I done?" she cried. "What have I done? How dare you suppose that *I* could do anything to drive her away?" She sat up, pushed her hair out of her eyes, and regarded him indignantly. "It's just a horrible mistake," she continued. "She does n't understand. She could n't see that I was only thinking of her. I could n't make her see it. I think I lost my head. She's never looked at me that way before and I could n't bear it. I did n't say it right somehow. I did n't get it straight. I could n't seem to make her see it the way I did — I was n't —"

He broke in savagely.

"It?" he said. "It? What's it? What could n't you make her see? What did n't you say right?"

She quailed before his vehemence. "Why," she said, "my plan. My way out. My —"

"But what was it?" he demanded; "what was this plan that you've been proposing to her and that's made her leave you like this? Tell me. Tell me at once, Mrs. Brackett," he cried, catching her by the shoulder and shaking her.

As her only protest against this indignity she wriggled herself out of his grasp. "If I tell you," she said, "will

you listen to me quietly, and let me tell it my own way?"

"Yes," he said impatiently. "Yes. But do it, for God's sake."

"Then," she said, "I will." Again she pushed the hair out of her eyes. "You know," she began, "that we're poor, but you don't know how poor. That Big Bull Company that you warned me against — it's failed. I had the news at Brighton a few days ago. That means that I've got about five hundred dollars a year to keep Doll and myself on. Five hundred dollars! Have you any idea what that means to two women like us? It was horrible enough before the Big Bull Company's failure, when I had over a thousand dollars a year; but this meant simply starvation and rags. I could n't face it. If I'd been alone I'd have made out somehow, but I could n't face it for Doll. I could n't. I might talk to you for a month and never make you understand what I felt. Only a mother could begin to guess at it. No man could. And Doll was crazy to act in the theatres. I begged her not to do it, but she would n't listen to me. Said it was her turn to do something for me. She was bound to do it. Well, Sir Richard, could I stand by and let that happen without trying to do something to prevent it? I could n't. No good mother could. I declare to you that I was just wild with terror about it. I know about the Stage and what kind of place it is and I swore my child should n't go near it.

"And then I thought of you, Sir Richard. It seemed like a message from Heaven!"

"Me?" he cried. "How could I keep her from going on the Stage?"

"Why," said Mrs. Brackett, scorning his dulness, "by marrying her, of course."

He stared at her. "I don't understand you," he said.

"You don't?" she cried. "You mean you don't *want* to marry her? But you do. You know you do!"

He let go of her and stood for a moment looking down on her scowling.

"God knows it!" he said at last bitterly. "And that was enough to drive her away, was it? By God!" he exclaimed with a harsh laugh, "I'll go abroad to-night, if I don't cut my throat first. I was a fool ever to think —"

"No," she said. "No!"

"And why not?" he asked abruptly.

"Because," she said, "it would n't be right. Suppose she thinks better of it. She may. Perhaps it was too sudden, the way I said it. She just ran out of here on an impulse. She'll come back to me. I know it. She can't stay away. She's got no money with her. And when she does come back, I'll be more cautious, Sir Richard. I'll make her see it differently. I can do most anything with Doll, if I have time. And, Sir Richard, if you and she were to marry, would n't it be wonderful? Oh! I can't bear to see my Doll poor."

The frankness of this last observation was lost upon him. He was not listening to her.

"Tell me," he commanded, "exactly what you said to her. For instance, how did you propose that we should marry? March is alive. We can't marry unless — Oh! what was this plan of yours?"

"Doll's married to George March," she said, speaking very fast and clearly. "Yes, that's so. And George March won't agree to let her divorce him, as any man

with a spark of generosity would do. I asked him to do it and he refused."

"You asked George that?"

"Yes, I did," she answered defiantly, "and he won't and that's all there is to it! Very good! Then we must try something else, must n't we? You, for instance. You're in love with Doll, I know it, don't I? Have n't I seen it in your eyes when you've looked at her, and in your voice when you've spoken to her and about her. A mother's wise to find out things like that. Very good! I know that if Doll can be free, there's a good man and a comfortable home just waiting for her. And George won't free her. And Doll has determined to become an actress right away. Can you wonder that I was nearly crazy, Sir Richard, that I had to save my child from *that* — from the Stage, I mean? I could think of only one thing. Can't you see what it was I asked her to do?"

"No," said Dick, "I'll be shot if I can." And though the answer to the question stared him in the face, though it was obvious that Mrs. Brackett's plan could be only what he had that morning himself resolved to attempt, he spoke the truth. For now he was once again regarding things from a point of view other than his own; once again he was thinking of Doll rather than of himself. It was Doll's welfare, not his, with which he and Mrs. Brackett were now concerned, and his own hopes and desires had faded, for the moment, altogether from his vision. "No," he repeated; "what was it? What did you ask her to do?"

"Why," she exclaimed, "to go away with you. She had only to give you one kind word — she had only —"

"Great God," he cried, "you suggested that to her! You did! *That!*!"

"Yes, I did. And I was right. Only Doll did n't see it that way. I can't understand it a little bit. It seemed to me such a simple way out. And I was to go along with her and you. It was to be only a form, just to compel George to bring a suit for divorce. And in a year it would have been all over; she'd have been free and she could have married you and taken up her life again and tried to get a little happiness out of it, and George March would only have been a memory, like a kind of bad dream. But Doll did n't seem to see it my way, and she said cruel and dreadful things to me and went right out of the apartment and she's never come back. And I'm afraid she's gone straight away and taken an engagement in some theatre, and if that's so my heart's broken; for it's I that drove her to it, and God knows," she moaned, "I was only acting for her good. Oh, my dear Sir Richard," she cried, her voice taking a new note of supplication, as the rage, which swayed her against her Fate, exhausted itself and a renewed perception of her loss swept over her, "can't we do anything whatever? Is n't it possible to fix things some way, so that Doll will be happy again? I do so want her to be happy. She's made for happiness, if ever a girl was. Oh! How I hate that George March! And yet I guess he's not so much to blame as I think, perhaps. Does n't it seem as if we were all just pieces in some cruel game that Life's playing with us for its own amusement? It does n't seem possible that human beings can mean to bring such trouble on themselves and on one another. When I had my money I used to believe that the Lord looked after us all; but lately I've begun to think that maybe that is n't so, or if it is, then that He does his work pretty carelessly. Oh!

it's frightful to say such things, but if you think them why should n't you? And I tell you that God is n't in this. He can't be. He just can't be, Sir Richard." Again she sank on the sofa and again her sobs mastered her.

If Mrs. Brackett was right in her explanation of Humanity's Purpose, the Player at this point of his game must have derived a good deal of amusement from the pawn that He had labelled Richard Crewe.

For now, with the cessation of Mrs. Brackett's voice, that young man opened his mouth and began to produce sentiments of the utmost moral correctness, which came very strangely from the lips of a man who had hastened to the place where he stood with his whole resolution made up to do immediately everything in his power to break the seventh commandment.

"You miserable old woman," he preluded, while his hands clenched themselves and his eyes flashed fire of the noblest description. "So that was your precious scheme, was it? And not content with imagining that I would lend myself to such a disgraceful business, you actually had the hardihood to propose it to your daughter. I congratulate you, Mrs. Brackett. I congratulate you, with all my heart. Any way to comfort is good enough for you, it seems, even through the Divorce Court. And Doll was to be dragged through it too," he added, realising that there had never been any question of Mrs. Brackett's appearing before that tribunal. "And Doll did n't see it your way, did n't she? You surprise me, Mrs. Brackett. You surprise me immensely. But what did you think Doll was that you should dare to suggest such an infamous idea to her? Did you suppose that,

because she was, unfortunately, your child, she was made of the same dirty clay as yourself? Well, you see that you were wrong. You find that there are limits to what you can do with Doll. And, by God! I'm glad of it. I'm glad you did this thing. It's broken your power over her and you'll never get it back again. Never! And now let me just thank you for the good opinion you have of *me*, Mrs. Brackett. You are right in thinking that I love Doll, but you're rather astray when you imagine that for the same reason I'm willing to do her the worst injury a man can do to a woman. Men are not all scoundrels, not even in England. And so, good-day to you," he concluded, turning from her where she lay on the sofa, with her face buried in her arms.

He picked up his hat and ran out of the place, glowing with virtuous indignation.

Let us laugh.

CHAPTER XXV

(1)

No one can tell how he will react to any given stimulus; and when that stimulus is applied the result is often quite amazing to himself. Dick was conscious, as he left Mrs. Brackett's flat, that he had expressed himself in language of the most stilted and melodramatic kind, and among other sensations of which he was aware was a sort of dull wonder that he could ever have spoken in that particular way. He remembered fine attitudes which he had adopted, large gestures of which he had been guilty; he had been theatrical and absurd and he blushed to think about it. So the small things intrude their silly presences among the great.

He was also shamefully convinced that he had played the hypocrite. Who was he to turn and rend Mrs. Brackett? Had she done anything worse than propose to Doll the very thing which he had come to induce Doll to do? How had it happened that his soul had so suddenly sickened at her? Why had it not already sickened at himself? Was it because she was Doll's mother? Was it this which had seemed to make her conduct so abominable? It must be that; it could be nothing else. And if so, what differentiated his own resolve from hers? Could a lover's love excuse what, in a mother, was odious? It was hard to think so.

These thoughts did not, I beg you to believe, present themselves to him in the form in which I have clothed

them. What I have written professes to do no more than crystallise for your reading the vague sensations of shame and remorse and horror which now possessed this unhappy young man. Definite thinking was impossible to him, only a perception of complex discomfort of the soul, which found its expression in the words which presently burst from him: "That little woman must be dotty and I have been a ghastly brute."

Well, well! That was all over now. One way or another he had been shown himself for what he was and there must be no more of it. That, at any rate, was certain.

He filled his chest and blew out a great puff of relief.

"Lord! Lord!" he said, "it takes a nasty jar like that to pull a man together when he's got in the state I've been in all winter. But that little woman must be off her onion. Think of her inventing such a scheme and actually suggesting it to Doll! Of all the poisonous ideas! Her own mother! But it's a fair knock-out," he cried.

His diction was already restored to its native impurity. With every slang phrase which he pronounced he seemed a little cleaner. It was terrible to him to find that in any circumstances he could talk like an Adelphi hero. He felt the need of much, of very much slang, just as he felt the need of much, of very much atonement. He, too, had plotted against Doll.

And what was to be done about Doll?

"She'll never go back to her mother," he reflected. "She's looking for an engagement on the Stage at this minute, just as her mother thinks. She'll be acting in some rotten show before you can say knife. And the Stage is no place for her. Her mother's right about that,

too. And she'll never go back. And she's no money with her, her mother said."

He paled. Doll alone, penniless, wretched as she must be, ignorant of the world as he knew she was — and in London, in the West End of London. Dick knew what dangers lurk, in that attractive quarter, for beautiful and ignorant and penniless young women.

"I must get hold of her somehow," he thought. "Can't let her go running about alone like that. I've got to have a talk with her if it's only to recommend her a decent place to live in; if it's only to lend her a fiver to be going on with till we can get things straightened out somehow. Oh, why the devil could n't George be decent to her? How on earth could he ever be anything else? It's simply monstrous to think that George could use her badly. But he must have done it, somehow, or why would she have left him? And I saw him make her cry. With my own eyes I saw it, damn him!"

"And how am I going to find her?" he went on. "And what the deuce am I to do when I do? She won't go back to her mother, she won't go back to George, and I would n't want her to. He's been a brute to her. But *somebody's* got to look after her. She's not fit to be on her own, poor darling. And *I* can't do it. But I can't let her be all alone in London with no money. I've simply got to find her, if it's only to lend her some money. And how am I going to find her?" he cried, completing the vicious circle. "I might spend a year hunting about in the West End without coming across her, and she's got to be found at once — before night. Wandering round the West End at night with no money! It does n't bear thinking about. I wonder if one of these private detec-

tives could do anything. I expect that's the best line, and I'm dashed if I can think of another."

Here there entered his mind the name of an agency which had some years earlier performed a small miracle for the benefit of a man whom he knew. He had forgotten most of the circumstances and only remembered vaguely that there had been 'letters' or 'a woman' in the story, which he had received from the lips of the rescued victim himself. But one thing was clear and that was the name of the wonder-worker.

"Don't forget, Dick," this man Horridge had said earnestly, tapping Dick's knee, "if ever you're in a hole of that kind, which the Lord forbid! don't forget to go to Judd. He's a marvel, take it from me. Why, Dick, he's given me a New Confidence in Life. I feel as if I don't need ever to be careful any more, now I've found out Judd. You write it down, Dick. Judd's Agency, 487 Shaftesbury Avenue. You never know when you may want a thing like that. You think you're a pretty wise old bird, I know, but you'll be caught napping some day like other people. And when the time comes that you're in need of a handy wizard, remember Judd. And here's to him! You write it down, old man," he had gone on, after a pause, "and get it by heart. I'd rather know it than the name of next year's Derby winner," he had concluded, wiping from his brow the perspiration which the recital of his dangers and escape had caused to appear there.

Dick had not written the name down, but it had stuck in his memory with the help of the advertisements of the Agency which he occasionally encountered in the newspapers. And now the time predicted by Horridge had

come; he stood in need of that 'handy wizard.' Judd was the man.

By this time he had reached Putney Station. He took a motor-cab and departed for Shaftesbury Avenue. On the way he verified the address of Judd from the Telephone Directory of a Post-Office which he passed. Then feeling that he could do no more for the present, he leaned back in the cab, lit a cigar, and closed his eyes. He had discovered that he was very tired.

(2)

Mr. Judd may have given Mr. Horridge a New Confidence in Life, but he did not seem to Dick at all the kind of person to inspire confidence in himself. Small, thin, quick of mind, acute of face, he was the very model of a Private Enquiry Agent; but Dick could not help feeling that, however clever and competent he might be, he was a good deal of a scoundrel. But we can only work with the tools we have. Dick knew nobody else in this line of work and he was in a great hurry. He therefore stated his business as shortly and clearly as he could, only allowing his distrust of Mr. Judd to change Doll's name to Miss Stevens and to announce himself as her half-brother.

When he had told his story, Mr. Judd reflected for a moment with the tips of his fingers and thumbs joined together before his face and his elbows supported upon the arm of his chair.

Then he said: "Sir Richard, this affair should not be difficult. Your sister is, you say, very tall, fair, remarkably — unusually beautiful, is an American, and

has left her home in order to become an actress. You wish me to find her for you before dark. I can promise nothing, of course, but I think I may tell you to hope. And when I tell you so much, Sir Richard, I mean that you may really hope.

"Now, what I am going to ask you to do is this. You see, we may find the young lady at any moment and we should wish to communicate with you at once. Whereas, if you are searching for her yourself, which, of course, you are going to do — ah ha — was I not right?" he cried, as Dick started, — "if I say, you are out in the streets searching, we shall not be able to find you. So all you can most usefully do is to go home to your rooms in —" he glanced at Dick's card — "in St. James's and remain there. You have a telephone, of course? Yes? Good! Stay indoors, then, and wait for the telephone to ring. That's easy, is n't it?" he asked with a sudden bright smile.

"No," said Dick, getting up, "it's not. It's about the hardest thing you can ask me to do; but if you say so, I'll do it, of course. I can see that you're right. And now," he added, "I won't keep you another minute. Remember speed is everything."

He got himself out of Mr. Judd's office, went home to his rooms, and sat down to wait. It was, as he had supposed, not easy.

(3)

Mr. Judd, speaking into his telephone, asked for Mrs. Romer, who presently arrived, an alert and clever-looking woman. She found Mr. Judd reading about County Families.

"Mrs. Romer," he said, "Sir Richard Crewe wants us to find his sister for him — his half-sister — whose name he gives as Miss Stevens. Now, I find that neither of his parents was twice married. But, of course, it is possible that this girl he's after is really called Stevens. She's tall, pretty, and an American, and she seems to be stage-struck, and he wants her badly and he's in a hurry about it. She's probably in some manager's office at this minute. So just ring up all of them you can, and ask if anything of the sort has blown in yet this afternoon, and if not, to ring me up if and when it does. I've sent our young gentleman home to sit with a receiver to his ear till we breathe him our message of comfort. So get busy about it, Mrs. Romer, and just ask Mr. Baily to step in here when he returns, will you?"

With these words Mr. Judd dismissed Sir Richard Crewe from his consideration until such time as he should be required to bring him back to it.

CHAPTER XXVI

(1)

HOPE is said to be a gift of the gods, designed to brighten the life of mortals; it may be as easily regarded as their bait to induce us to prolong an entertainment which we afford them. Whatever it is there is no denying that it does its work.

Doll left the offices of Mr. Malison in a state of complete dejection. The less we anticipate a disappointment, the greater it is when it comes. Doll had never supposed that she could be refused, and now that this incredible thing had happened, she was completely overthrown. Her power to compel men to do the things she wished them to do had been the keystone to the fabric of her self-confidence. Her failure in the case of George had never shaken this belief in herself. He had been her husband, and husbands were, obviously, better equipped for resistance than other men. But, George apart, she had never, in all her life, had to do much more than open her lovely eyes in order to obtain from a man — any man — whatsoever she might condescend to ask.

When the manager began to explain that he could not give her an engagement, she had, simply, not understood him. But as he continued his extraordinary observations, she was gradually forced to perceive what he meant. In the beginning it had seemed merely absurd, then possible, then real. He was rejecting her. And when, at last, she discovered that he was advising her to go to another

manager, she could no longer pretend to doubt. I imagine that, than this, nothing he could have said would have had greater power to convince her that he was in earnest.

Shaken already to the very foundations of her self-confidence, she was very ill-prepared to hear his concluding words; and his well-meant advice to return to her mother only served to emphasise unbearably the dazed sense of utter helplessness which his refusal to employ her had already produced.

If this Malison denied her, it seemed, there was no place for her anywhere at all. The courage which her belief in her own powers had hitherto, however precariously, maintained, was gone in a moment and she was left, all alone, face to face with the world whose savage cruelty she had only lately learned to dread and whose vast kindness had never really touched her.

So, weeping, she had risen from her chair and, leaving the manager to stride, spouting, across and across his carpet, she had crept out of the room and down the stairs, with no thought of where she was going and with no hope but to escape from this man who seemed to have crushed her very soul.

And had she delayed her going but another minute, she would have won her fight. But the seeds of Doll's defeat had been sown at her birth; success, too long continued, had destroyed her power to rise above a single sudden disaster; and upon Mrs. Brackett, with all who had so amiably conspired to save Doll from making the discovery that skittles and beer are not the only components of Life, must be laid the responsibility both for the poor thing's wretchedness and for the salvation of those prin-

ciples upon which the excellent Mr. Malison so properly prided himself.

And even as she turned the corner of the stairs came Hope to whisper in her ear that the game was not yet lost and that Malison was not the only manager in London. At once her self-confidence took heart, her pride stiffened her trembling lip, and her indignation awoke against the insolent person who had dared to refuse her proposal to act for him. Her trailing, dispirited feet picked themselves up to spurn the staircase of Malison; and before she had regained the street a lively wrath had invaded her breast, which had seemed, a minute earlier, to be the settled abode of despair. Hope, gift or snare of the gods, had once again prevailed.

(2)

What theatre had he said? The Siddons, was n't it? Yes, that was it. And Mr. — Mr. — what was the name? No matter. She could find that out later. It was the theatre that was important. He had said that she would get an engagement there. Very well; let her go at once and get it. With only about five pounds to her credit in the world there was no time to be lost. It would be a great comfort if she could get an engagement this afternoon. It was very tiring, this trailing about London, and the sooner she got 'fixed' the better. Malison had, of course, been simply stupid; he had not understood what an opportunity had come his way. But there could not be many managers like that. Indeed, he had said so, and had actually seemed to take pride in the circumstance, poor creature.

She dismissed Malison from her consideration and, with some idea of being economical, asked a policeman the shortest way to the Siddons Theatre. This policeman happened to be an officer who took an intelligent interest in his work and it was his peculiar pride to excel in accurate knowledge of that very confusing part of London which is bounded by Oxford Street, St. Martin's Lane, the Strand, and Kingsway. It was therefore necessary for him to exhibit this knowledge to Doll. Another and less intelligent man would have sent her up Drury Lane, at the foot of which she was standing, and so to the left, by Long Acre, to Charing Cross Road, where, as every one knows, the Siddons Theatre perpetuates the memory of our particular Tragic Muse and, at the same time, having united verbal Inanity to Musical Insipidity in an apparently indissoluble wedlock, shelters the ephemeral children of that unhallowed union during the year's or eighteen months' existence which the favour of the public accords them.

I say a less intelligent policeman would have done this — or some of it.

The person from whom Doll sought guidance was far too clever to do anything so simple. After a moment's deep thought behind half-closed eyes he exploded into a sort of firework of directions. He had it all measured to a yard in his head. Down this street and up that he traced her course; bearing to the right, bearing to the left, with a short but incredibly complicated cut among the barrows and fruit-boxes of Covent Garden till via the passage by the New Theatre he brought her out into Charing Cross Road exactly opposite her destination.

He seemed to prophesy.

It appeared as if a hundred miles could not be long enough to provide room for so many deviations.

Doll quailed. "Perhaps," she said, "I'd better take a taxi after all."

The policeman was hurt and showed it. "It is n't worth it, miss," he said. "It's no more than a step. You go down there" — he turned to illustrate his instructions with pointings and swayings of his body — "as far as the other side of Catherine Street, cross into Wellington Street and up to the right; then first to the left along Tavistock —"

Here, looking round for appreciation, he discovered that he was addressing the empty air. Doll, weary of him, had stopped a crawling cab and was getting into it, ten yards away. He was so much annoyed that he was compelled to stop an unoffending lorry, piled with a mountain of fruit-baskets, and take the name and address of its driver.

(3)

Doll drove to the Siddons Theatre, paid a shilling, and having learned that the box-office is not the place in which to seek the management, began to walk round the building in search of the office door. Nothing of the sort was to be discovered, but finding another 'Stage Door' she enquired there and was directed to a number in Cranbourne Street. It appeared, then, that managers did not always have their offices in their theatres. Her education was advancing.

Presently she was in a second outer office in which two more girls clicked typewriters. Her name was taken and

she was desired to wait, being shown, for this purpose, into a room where were some chairs and a large table littered with copies of theatrical newspapers. On one of the chairs a young woman, of about her own age, was seated reading in a little thin book, sheathed in brown paper. She was dressed in a very pronounced way and her complexion was startlingly false. She looked up as Doll came in, bestowed upon her a glance of haughty indifference, and resumed her occupation. Doll, not liking her appearance at all, took a chair as far removed from her as possible and sat down, controlling her impatience which the delay was causing her.

Time passed and nothing happened. Behind an inner door a murmur of conversation, broken, every now and then, by a laugh, went on interminably.

Doll's foot began to tap the floor irritably.

The young woman laid her brown-paper book on the table, stretched, yawned, and observed: "This is the life."

Doll, cowed, welcomed even this offer of companionship.

"Do you think," she asked, "that Mr. Froude will be engaged a very long while?" She had found the manager's name on the door of the office.

"It's better for me and it's better for you not to 'think' about it one way or the other," was the reply. "The fact is, it won't bear thinkin' about. Do you know how long I've been here?"

"Well, of course I don't," said Doll.

"Two hours," said the other, "and" — she glanced at her wrist-watch — "twenty-three and a half minutes precisely. But that's nothing, that is n't. I keep a little record at home. I read it whenever I get down-hearted.

It's as good as a tonic to me, dear. Makes me angry, see? Helps me to go *on*, see? Oh! these managers have got something coming to them if I ever get up to the top."

This puzzled Doll, who had never hitherto encountered the passionate hope of the climbing artist some day to settle his score with the middleman.

"Is that so?" she said politely.

"Yes, dear," said the other, "it is. I wonder if it interests you to hear that I've been kicking my heels in managers' offices just a trifle over two hundred and forty-seven hours since the new year. In days, it makes very near eleven. And what's the result? This" — she picked up her brown-paper book and slapped it down on the table — "this rotten little sketch that may perhaps get a trial week at some rotten little hall in some rotten little suburb and then be declined with thanks. And a fortnight's rehearsals and not a penny to show for it all. It's chronic," she concluded — "chronic!"

Doll was interested. "Is that a part?" she asked.
"May I see it?"

"Yes," said the other, angrily throwing the book across the table. "You may. But it's not a part; not what *I* call a part." Then her anger gave way to astonishment as she recognised the nature of Doll's question.

"Why," she cried, "you've never seen a part before, then?"

"No," said Doll, as she picked the book up.

"A beginner!" exclaimed the girl.

"That's so," said Doll, opening the book curiously.

"Oh, you poor dear!" cried the other. "Oh! you poor silly innocent thing."

Doll did n't hear her. She was absorbed in an endeav-

our to understand what she was reading. It seemed very disconnected. It looked like this:—

.....Here she is at last.
Enter Cora.
.....when Uncle comes.
Why?
.....if *you* don't.
I dare say.
.....to hear you.
Where are the cigarettes?
.....at least, so Charlie says.

She had reached this point when the door into the outer office opened and a typist put in her head.

"Miss Guest," she said in a voice of perfect indifference.

The owner of the part at once lost all sympathy for Doll. She rose, plucked her property from between Doll's fingers, and disappeared through the inner door.

The typist closed the other door. Doll was alone.

For some little time the effect of Miss Guest's unceremonious conduct caused her to forget her annoyance at being kept waiting; but soon it passed away and the more important irritation recovered its power. She was beginning to be seriously angry when the outer office door again opened and a middle-aged man in check tweeds came in. He wore a white bowler hat on his head, rather to one side. And he was clad in tweeds of a vivid black-and-white check and he had a rose in his buttonhole. The grotesque irregularity of his features advertised the comedian.

Perceiving Doll, he swept off his hat, favoured her with a conquering glance, and took a chair. Doll affected to occupy herself with a current copy of *The Era*, but she

could not read a word. The man's presence in the room made her vaguely uneasy. She was very conscious of his stare.

After a short silence he gave a little cough, put his hat on the table, and folded his arms. Then he began to hum an air. None of his overtures meeting with any response he became a little more direct.

"I love perfectly silent girls," he observed, with an effect of addressing nobody in particular. Doll gave him further reason to admire her.

"What I mean to say is this," he continued, "that if there's one thing that gets me quicker than another it's a girl who — " Here he was interrupted by a slight hiccup. Unaware, apparently, that he had failed to complete his sentence he went on. "And any one who says she does n't is a liar."

He spoke these last words in a loud voice which breathed defiance to a world of possible disputants.

Doll became alarmed. What was the matter with the man?

"What's her name?" he enquired. "What's her charming name? Lottie? Daisy? Gertie? Millie? Birdie? — or just what?"

Doll began to tremble with indignation and fear. The paper shook in her hands. She raised it before her face: it was the only protection she had.

The man got up and advanced upon her. He put a hand on the top of the paper and pulled it suddenly down. "Peep!" he cried. "Peep bo!"

Doll leaped to her feet and ran out of the room into the outer office, because the man was between her and Mr. Froude's room. Without stopping a moment she ran

through the office, flung the door open, and flew down the stairs, panting, into the street.

Behind her a young woman who had just come in and was talking in a low voice to the elder typist, turned quickly and hurried out after her.

"That was a pretty near thing," said the younger typist with a laugh.

"A miss is as good as a mile," replied the other. "Anyhow, it's none of our business. I wonder what she's done, though. And now I'll go and give that Ruggles a piece of my mind, the beast. Nearly spoiled our game, he did. I hope that woman'll pony up all right."

She rose quickly and went into the waiting-room.

"Mr. Ruggles," she said indignantly, "what have you been doing?"

"I assure you," said the comedian, laying a hand upon his heart, "I assure you, my dear Miss White, that I have n't the least—" Again his utterance was impeded. "One moment she was here. The next she was—" Once more a sentence was left to take care of itself.

"You beast!" said Miss White, quite without heat. "You're drunk. Get out of this."

"Oh, my dear Miss White," he protested. But she would have none of him. She simply pointed through the open door at her side. "Outside," she said, always quietly.

He took up his hat and went without another word.

Miss White was a power.

"It's not," said Miss White severely as she followed him through the office, — "it's not as if it had never happened before. I warned you that time and I warn you this time, and if you ever come here again in that state

I'll tell Mr. Froude, and then you may as well retire into the provinces. You're not such a very funny merchant that London will cry its eyes out for you. You *looked* all right. Did n't he, May?"

"Yes," said the other typist, as she put in a fresh sheet of paper, "he *looked* all right."

"Well," Miss White went on as she held the outer door open and pointed his way relentlessly, "you know what to expect if I ever have any more trouble with you. And now take my advice and go home to your wife. You're not fit to be about the West End."

"Oh, come!" he protested, his manhood asserting itself under the spur of this outrageous accusation. "I'm not as bad as all *that*, Miss White. 'Ve only been having one or two. It was somebody's birthday. May've been mine, I dare say. Lunch at Scott's, you know. Cock lobster. So big," he spread his arms to their fullest extent. "Sul-erpatice Crustashial. Wow!" he concluded as he passed through the door. "That was a pill, was n't it?"

The need had passed of ruling his pronunciation in the presence of Miss White.

CHAPTER XXVII

(1)

DOLL reached the street in a state of panic, but no sooner was she safe outside the building and on the thronged pavement than her anger, temporarily abated by fear, reasserted itself. She marched down Cranbourne Street, head erect, eyes blazing, hands clenched, to the admiration and delight of several gentlemanly strollers. Not far behind moved a young woman who had emerged from the door immediately after her. She kept an even distance from Doll, whose indignant feet carried her into Leicester Square, past the Empire Theatre, and so into Piccadilly as far as the Green Park. Here the horrid sense of desolation under which she had suffered all afternoon in its turn drove out her anger by suddenly suggesting to her the question, "What am I to do now?"

Tired to death, sick at heart, she allowed herself to be enticed by the quiet and seclusion of the Park. There, at any rate, she could rest and collect her strength and wits which the events of the afternoon had come near to dissipating completely. It was obviously necessary for her to decide upon some course of action; obviously impossible to go on walking like this. She must think and think hard.

She turned in at the gate and sat down on a bench, and, relaxing all her body and closing her eyes, gave herself up greedily to the ineffable joys of repose. Almost at once she slept. The young woman who had been following her

sat down likewise on a neighbouring bench; but this one did not sleep.

The evening was closing in upon London when Doll awoke, and behind the budding plane trees the long line of the Piccadilly houses lay darkly beautiful against the fading gold of the sunset. The street lamps were beginning to shine and everywhere darted the lights, yellow and red, of the hurrying traffic in the roadway.

For a moment Doll, unable to remember how she had come to this place, was frightened; the next, the vacancy in her memory was filled and with a heavy sigh she got upon her feet, and walked away, her shadow, from the neighbouring bench, pursuing. Doll was cold and stiff, but the dreadful weariness was gone and her mind was active once more. Instantly it attacked the question which she had come into the Park to decide: 'What was she to do now?'

The threat of night made the answer simple. A lodging of some kind must be found at once. "How lucky," she thought, "that I got that money this morning! I wonder how much I have." She opened her blouse and took out the purse which some rudimentary instinct (perhaps that of self-preservation) had caused her to conceal there as she had begun to drowse on the bench. She poured out the coins into her hand and counted them. Was that all? What on earth had she done with the rest. Ah! the purse. Five shillings and something, was n't it? she had paid for it. Yes, about a dollar and a half, she remembered. And two cabs! It was a positive relief to her to find that she had not lost the money.

Well, five pounds was better than nothing. She could live on that for a day or two, she supposed, and by that

time she would be sure to have an engagement. She must be braver and more patient the next time she went to see Froude. But that horrible man! It would be very hard to go back there. But it would have to be done.

And now, where was she to sleep?

The Hotel Ritz presented itself to her eye. She knew the Hotel Ritz pretty well; had dined there more than once. It was a very good hotel, she had always heard.

She left the Park and entered the Hotel Ritz. With the mere passage of the circular door her confidence seemed to return. At last she felt at home. The luxurious hall seemed to breathe a warm and friendly welcome to her and the porters and boys who stood about in their quiet, well-made uniforms impressed her with a sensation of power and dignity. They were only existing to obey her orders. She would not be 'kept waiting' here.

(2)

She went up to the office and asked for a room. The clerk stared a little, for neither Doll's costume nor its condition were precisely what he was accustomed to. But he gave her a number and called it to one of the porters.

"What luggage, madam?" this person enquired.

Doll was aghast. She had none.

In a moment all her new-found confidence had been blown to shreds and she stood with open mouth gazing at the man despairingly. Then, without a word of explanation, she turned and hurried out of the hotel. She could not confess to the Hotel Ritz that she had no baggage.

This was the very first time in all her life that Doll had been asked to show her luggage in a hotel. Either her

mother or George had always hitherto looked after all that sort of thing.

Now she was in a panic, indeed. She had made the terrible discovery that, unless she could get some baggage, she would be unable to get a room for the night. This was what she believed. The expedient of paying in advance never occurred to her, because, I suppose, she had never heard of it; but she did happen to know that luggage was the hotel-keepers' security against his guests, because once, a year or two earlier, she and her mother had arrived in Verona with nothing but their handbags, and her mother had laughingly remarked that it was well she was known at The Excelsior, because otherwise they might have had to sleep in the waiting-room; and this had led to a conversation in the course of which Doll had acquired the piece of information which I have just mentioned.

Compelled to rapid action by the urgency of her case, she ran across Piccadilly and went into a big leather-shop where she bought a small suitcase for two pounds. Then she set out in search of a few things which she would need for the night, a toothbrush, tooth-paste, a comb, a brush, a nightgown, and so forth. The day's business was almost over and all the shops were getting ready to close; but Doll's needs were not many and were all quickly supplied — the silver-backed hairbrush was a really very nice one. She succeeded also in obtaining a pair of pale-blue bedroom slippers. By the time she was fully equipped, her purse contained a little over fifteen shillings. When she discovered this she went through another short panic, but soon the thought of the morrow and the engagement which it was to bring allayed her fear to some extent.

(3)

A new anxiety now assailed her.

Darkness had come on; she stood alone in crowded Piccadilly with a brand-new bag in her hand. The darkness and the people terrified her. A hotel was absolutely necessary and she did not know to what hotel to go. Her means had become so much reduced that even she perceived the necessity of finding some place with a lower scale of prices than that of The Ritz. In any event, she could not have faced The Ritz again. They would perhaps know her at The Savoy, she reflected, for it was there that she and her mother had always stayed when they had been in London before her marriage; but she felt certain that The Savoy was too costly for her now. About the other West End hotels she knew nothing at all. If she could only remember the name of some good boarding-house — there were plenty of them in Bloomsbury, she knew, where many friends of hers had stayed and been very comfortable. But she had never been greatly interested in boarding-houses and now she could not recall the address of a single one. If only she had been able to remain in her club! But her resignation from it had been the first of her mother's economies, and though it had been sent in too late to save the liability for this year's subscription, that subscription had never been paid, — it had not been possible, — and her name had, of course, already been cut off the list.

Again a panic laid hold of Doll, and this time it did not quickly pass away. No thought of that engagement which would be hers to-morrow could help her now. The night had to be passed somewhere and somehow and

wherever she turned the danger of the unknown threatened her.

She wondered, trembling, if a policeman could give her any advice as to a respectable and inexpensive hotel; but Doll had the New Yorker's suspicion of all policemen. They were all very well to help one over a busy street, but not precisely the advisers that a lonely and beautiful woman should choose who sought an asylum from the terrors of the darkness. No, no man was to be trusted in her extremity. If she could only find some woman with a face in which she could feel confidence! But somebody she must ask, or remain abroad all night.

A young woman, quietly dressed, was loitering near her, reading an evening newspaper by the light of a street lamp. She looked as if she might be waiting for her omnibus. Doll walked past her and endeavoured to catch a glimpse of her face. She succeeded sufficiently to be satisfied that, at any rate, she might go farther and fare worse. The fear which oppressed her drove her into action, and stopping she turned, came up to the woman, and spoke.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "but may I ask your advice?"

(4)

The young woman raised her eyes from the newspaper and gave Doll a friendly nod.

"Surely," she said. "What's the matter?"

"Why," said Doll, "the fact is I want to find a hotel, but I don't know any near here except some that I can't afford. Maybe you know of a respectable place that's

not very expensive. I'm sorry to trouble you, but I've just got to ask some one."

"Yes," said the other, "I think I know a place that'll suit you. It's not far from here. I'll take you there if you like, as it's not too easy to find. I'm in no hurry myself for ten minutes or so."

"Why," said Doll delightedly, "that's very good of you and if it won't bother you too much —"

"Not a bit," said her new friend. "Come along. I suppose four shillings is n't too much for you, bed and breakfast?"

"No," said Doll, "that seems pretty reasonable, does n't it?"

"To tell you the truth," said the young woman as they walked along, "I was rather hoping you'd speak to me. In fact, I was waiting by that lamp to give you the chance. I'd spotted that you were in some sort of trouble, and this is n't a locality for girls like you to be in a fix in. It's not every one that you might ask for advice hereabouts who'd give you the kind of help that you'd find particularly good for you."

"No," said Doll, "is that so? I suppose you mean it's a rough section. I have heard so and that was what frightened me. I'm glad I spoke to you."

"So am I," said the other. "Up this street, please."

Doll followed trustingly, and they talked, as they went, of one thing and another. Doll was very grateful and her guide was very friendly, and with every step her alarm subsided more and more. She took hardly any note of where they were going, though she recognised Regent Street as they crossed it, near Piccadilly Circus. But soon the network of small streets, running all ways,

into which they immediately plunged had quite destroyed such slight sense of direction as she possessed. At last they found themselves in a quiet *cul-de-sac* outside a small, white-painted house above whose door the fan-light displayed the legend "Lothinga's Hotel."

"Here we are," said Doll's guide. "I'll just come in and make sure that you've got a room before I leave you. You can dine here, so there'll be no need for you to come out of doors again. The food's simple, but very decent quality; and you need n't be afraid of the sheets. But, of course, it's not Claridge's. I'll make the arrangements for you, if you like."

(5)

They went in together. The place was unpretentious, but cosy. A long, narrow hall opened out into a tiny lounge where a fire burned brightly, for the darkness had brought a cold wind with it. Behind the office window sat, knitting busily, an ugly old Jewess in a very obvious wig.

"You stay here by the fire," said Doll's guide, and went on to the office. She spoke for a few minutes with the old woman behind the window and then came back. "It's all right," she said. "They can give you a nice room on the third floor. With breakfast it'll be four shillings, as I said, and your dinner'll be half-a-crown. I've told them to get it ready at once. You look as if you could do with a bit of food."

"That's fine," said Doll. Her relief was, indeed, tremendous. "I suppose," she went on hesitatingly, "that you can't stop and have dinner with me. I'd be ever so

happy if you can. You've been very good to me and I'd like you to know that I'm grateful."

"Oh, nonsense!" said the other, "I've done nothing. Only too glad to be able to give you a hand. So I'll say good-bye and good luck. And if you'll take my advice you'll go up to your room now and have a thorough good wash and brush up and then come down and eat as much dinner as you can, and, if it'll run to it, put away a pint of burgundy as well; and then go right up to bed and sleep like a top till the morning and I'll answer for it that you won't know yourself. So good-bye." And she held out her hand.

"Well," said Doll, "give me your name at least."

"That's easy," said the other. "Robson; Miss Clare Robson. Got it? Good-bye."

With a strong hand-shake she was gone. Doll looked after her regretfully, until, with a backward look and a last wave of the hand, she disappeared round the side of the doorway. Then Doll went over to the old Jewess and asked to be shown her room. A lad appeared from somewhere, took her bag, and asked her to follow him. They entered a minute lift and were carried aloft.

No sooner had this happened than the old woman got off her high stool, came out of the little office, and waddled slowly to the door. Peering out, she clapped her hands and at once waddled back. Before she was fairly reseated on her stool Doll's guide was back at her window.

"She's gone up all right," said the Jewess.

"Splendid!" said the other. "And now I want to talk through your telephone, Mrs. Lothinga."

"And so you shall, my dear," replied the old woman. "Step inside the box."

After a short conversation Doll's guide came out of the box with a satisfied smile on her face.

"That's all right," she said. "Mind you live up to the reputation that I've given your kitchen, Mrs. Lothinga. Good-night to you. I hope my gentleman won't keep me waiting out there very long. I want to get home to my good man. He's pretty weak to-day."

And with that she went down the passage and again disappeared.

CHAPTER XXVIII

(1)

MISS CLARE ROBSON's hopes were fulfilled; she had not long to wait for her young gentleman outside Lothinga's Hotel. Well within ten minutes a cab swung into the *cul-de-sac* and drew up at the hotel door. Dick turned from paying the driver to find Miss Robson at his elbow.

"Sir Richard Crewe?" she asked, though she knew him perfectly, her quick eyes having noted him as he had passed through the outer room of Mr. Judd's offices, on his way to interview the agent.

"Yes," said Dick. "You're from Mr. Judd, I suppose."

"That's right. Your sister's upstairs. She'll be dining presently. You'd better wait till she comes down."

"I can't tell you how grateful I am," Dick began—but she cut him short. She wanted to get home to her man. Even among the employés of private detectives the domestic virtues are sometimes cultivated and Mr. Romer was a consumptive from whom his wife was forced (in order to keep him alive as long as possible) to absent herself a great deal oftener and for much longer periods than she liked.

"Don't you worry about thanking me, Sir Richard," she said. "It's been all in a day's work. I'd have rung you up long ago, only I didn't dare to lose sight of her until I'd got her safe for you, and she would keep wandering about so. I got in touch with her half an hour after

you'd left the office. I was sorry to keep you waiting, but it could n't be helped. And it's all well that ends well, is n't it?"

"You're sure it's Miss — Miss —"

"Stevens!" Mrs. Romer prompted him with a smile. She believed that he was a scoundrel, but it was a principle with her always to be pleasant to clients. Her 'man' to Mrs. Romer was of more importance than all the pretty and innocent girls alive.

"Quite so," said Dick. "You're sure it's she."

"I don't think there are likely to be two young American ladies as fair and as beautiful as Miss Stevens looking for theatrical engagements in London to-day," she said, "but if you'd like me to wait till you're sure about it, I'll do so gladly."

"No," he said excitedly, "it's all right. I can see her in the hall now. Will you accept this?" It was a five-pound note.

"Gladly," said Mrs. Romer, taking it. She knew whom to trust and whom not to trust to refrain from making damaging disclosures to Mr. Judd. "Thank you very much, Sir Richard. Best of luck. And if you mention my name, Mrs. Lothinga will do anything for you. Say you're a friend of Miss Robson's — of Judd's!"

Dick shook her warmly by the hand and went into the hotel. She stood looking after him for a moment, with a slight frown on her face; then she shrugged her shoulders and went away to telephone her report to her employer and take her train to Ealing.

(2)

When Dick reached the window behind which Mrs. Lothinga sat at her knitting, Doll had already passed into the dining-room. With a word to the old woman — a mumble about his wanting dinner — he followed her in.

The room was long and dark and frowsy. At the far end of it a table was laid where a single light shone upon the wall. A shabby waiter there was putting out a chair for Doll, whose back was presented to Dick as she made her way along the floor.

She took her place, put her elbows upon the table, and laying her chin in her hands waited, staring at the blank wall, for her food to be brought. Her attitude was one of the deepest dejection. Dick halted in the doorway, and whispered a curse upon Mrs. Brackett. At the same time a wave of hot longing swept over him. But he clenched his hands and fought the beast off. There was to be no more of that.

The waiter advanced upon him, an encouraging smile on his lips. "Table, sir?" he asked. Dick motioned him imperiously to be silent. The man, puzzled but obedient, went over to a sideboard and began to move things about there. His presence threatened an intolerable embarrassment. Dick caught his curious eye and beckoned to him. The fellow arrived and Dick, putting a sovereign in his palm, indicated the door. In places like Lothinga's Hotel the menials have quicker wits, for some things, than elsewhere. The waiter laid his finger along his nose, winked knowingly at Dick, slid his coin into a pocket, and tiptoed out of the room.

Dick shut the door and went boldly forward.

Surprised by resolute footsteps instead of the waiter's shuffle, Doll turned her head and peered into the gloom. Next moment she had started to her feet.

"You!" she cried.

"Look here, Mrs. March," he said, halting instantly, "you've got to understand at once that I'm your friend, your servant, and that if you tell me to go away I'll go and you shall never see me again. But I ask you to hear what I've got to say first."

She sat down.

"All right," she said listlessly, "but if you've come to try to take me back to my mother, you may as well know that you're not going to do it."

"I have n't," he said. "I've seen your mother and she's told me why you've left her, and I want to tell you that I'm sure you did perfectly right."

"Well, I guess I did," she said defiantly. Then her voice changed and took a pleading note. She clasped her hands and, "Oh, Sir Richard," she said, "you did n't know anything about it, did you? She said you did n't, but I want to hear you say it."

"Certainly I did n't," he replied.

"Then," she said with a little laugh of relief, "that's all right. I could n't believe it of you." She covered her face with her hands for a moment; then, looking up again, her eyes bright with tears, she stretched out a hand to him. He ran forward and took it eagerly.

"You poor thing," he said, "I'm so sorry for you."

"Sit down here," she said — her confidence completely restored. "We'll have dinner together, shan't we? — and talk it all over quietly. I believe you're my friend, Sir Richard, and I do want a friend just now. It's

been a terrible time for me and I feel so lonely. Perhaps you can give me some advice, for I'm right up against it and I don't know what to do."

(3)

He took a chair from another table, placed it beside hers, and sat down. His whole being was filled with joy and love for her; but not a trace of selfish desire remained in his heart. By chance or by instinct Doll had hit upon the very best way to command this honest, generous soul. She had declared her belief in him; she had thrown herself on his protection; she had confided herself to his honour and his friendship. It was not in Crewe to resist such an appeal.

"Look here," he said. "We must have everything clear and open and aboveboard between us from this moment. Otherwise we shall find ourselves in difficulties in no time. So I'm going to begin by telling you that I've loved you from the first moment I saw you and that I shall love you till I die. No," he cried, as a startled look came upon her face, "don't misunderstand me. I'm not going to make love to you. That's all over for me, Doll. I mean it. I'm your friend, that's all, and I'm never going to refer to my love again as long as I live. But I've got to tell it to you once, so that we can know exactly where we are. I know you don't care for me in that way and that you never will and I'm ready to face it. But I think you like me enough to let me help you, if I can, in this trouble that's come upon you."

"Yes," she said, "that's so. But I wish you had n't told me. It makes me feel so mean. It always did make

me feel mean. And it does n't seem as if I can ever do anything to stop it. I never wanted men to fall in love with me. Never! But they always did, or most always. And it did make me feel so badly to have to refuse them. In those days I did n't know what it meant to them, either. But I do now, and I'm ever so sorry for you, Sir Richard. It's just awful the way things happen, in this rotten old world."

"Well —" he began, but she had more to say.

"You see, Sir Richard," she went on, "it's not as if I were not fond of you. I think you're a dear. I've always liked you and it was always a great pleasure to me to see you any time. And George —" She halted suddenly and was silent, crumbling bread.

"Go on," he said.

She continued to crumble bread.

"Go on," he said again.

All at once she laid her arms on the table and buried her face in them. Her wild weeping broke the stuffy silence of Mrs. Lothinga's dining-room.

"Oh, my God!" cried Dick. "Don't do that, my dear girl. Come, come; it's not so bad as all that. You've got to be brave, Doll, if you mean to look after yourself. Crying's no sort of damned use, you know; and it's simply killing me to hear you. Besides, George is n't worth a single one of your tears," he went on indignantly, for it was obvious that her mention of George's name had been the cause of this outburst. "I should have supposed," he said, following the frenzied search of his mind for arguments to stop this terrible, hopeless weeping that tore his heart, — "I should have supposed you had too much pride to let the thought of George make you unhappy."

With that she raised her face and regarded him miserably. "George," she said, — "George is the best and noblest man on God's earth and I've flung his love away. If I could go back to George this minute, do you think I'd be sitting here talking to *you*?"

He stared at her. "What are you saying?" he cried. "Did n't he drive you out of his house with his unkindness?"

"No," she said, "he did n't. He did n't. Why, he could n't be unkind to save his life. He's the most splendid man alive. I'm not worthy to black his boots. I was just a spoiled, selfish fool who did n't know enough to value the best thing in the world when I had it. That's why I left him; because I could n't see him right. I was just blind and crazy with selfishness. And my mother — that's another thing I have to thank her for. She made me go away from George. And I knew she was doing it all the time; that's the worst of it. Oh! I've been a wicked fool; but mother's been a worse one. How can I ever go back to her?"

"But look here," he said, "do you mean that you love George still; that you want to go back to him?"

"Why, certainly I do," she cried. "What else would I mean?"

"Well," he almost shouted with a laugh, "why in the name of all that's absurd, *don't* you go back to him, then?"

"You don't understand," she said. "Not a bit. You can't. You were n't there. You did n't hear what we said to each other. It's impossible that he should ever care for me again after the way I treated him. And the way he spoke to me — that cold, bitter way — showed me that

I'd killed his love. And I was glad to think it then, actually glad. And when he told me to choose between him and my mother, I never hesitated a minute. Not a minute. It seemed such a relief to have come to it at last, after all those weeks and months of quarrelling and hating. For I hated George at that moment, and it seemed good to me to know that I'd killed his love and made him as miserable as I was. And so I chose my mother. I never stopped to think what I was doing. It seemed the only thing to do. I felt as if I'd do anything to get away from that house where I'd had such bad times. And so I chose my mother — my mother — oh, me! what a fool I was — And you see what's come of that. I've had to leave her now and I'm all alone. And I'm afraid, Sir Richard. I'm afraid. It's dreadful to be all alone."

"Well," said Dick, "if I were you I would n't be alone another half-hour. From what I know of George he's not the man to hate you, whatever you did. I never could understand his being unkind to you, for he's the most generous soul in the world. I expect I would n't have believed it if I had n't *wanted* to. Why don't you let me take you out to Hampstead in a cab, now."

"I think," she said, "I'd rather die. Never suggest such a thing to me again. My pride's about all I've got left, and I'm not going to lose that, too. I tell you," she concluded bitterly, "George hates me. Don't I know it?"

Dick saw that this was not the time to press her. She was too much overwrought for such an argument, and he did not dare to risk a breach with her. He knew what he was going to do, and it would help him in no way to cause her to quarrel with him and perhaps insist on leaving the hotel and going her own way.

"All right," he said soothingly, "I quite understand what you feel and I dare say you're perfectly right. But this is n't helping you as I promised to do. Suppose we have dinner and then you can tell me your plans and perhaps I can give you some advice. You want to go on the Stage, don't you? Well, I know a manager or two and I might do something with them."

"You do?" she cried. "Oh, Sir Richard, how lovely!"

His invitation to abandon the subject of her past troubles and the promise for her future that his words contained were irresistible. At once she began to tell him what she wanted to do.

"I've got to support myself now, you see," she said. . . .

He left her about nine o'clock, calmed, cheered, well-fed and sleepy, for the emotions of her day had worn her out.

From the lift as she went up to bed she waved a brave good-night to him, and the smile that accompanied the gesture was as dazzling as any that she had ever bestowed upon him. But it vanished from her lips as soon as she had been carried out of sight of him. With the loss of his companionship the realisation of her position had returned upon her with redoubled force. She felt very lonely and very much afraid.

(4)

Dick went straight into the telephone box of the hotel and called for George's number. Presently George's voice spoke in his ear, saying politely, "Who is it?"

Dick spoke his name and at once George's voice changed.

"Dick!" he cried delightedly in his surprise. Then his voice changed again, for he had suddenly remembered that Dick was no longer his friend. "What do you want?" he enquired icily.

"I want you," said Dick; "it's very important."

"Indeed!" said George calmly and rang off.

Dick became frantic in the box. Again he shouted for George's number. Again came the cold voice saying its absurd "Hello?"

"Old boy," Dick cried, "I want to ask your forgiveness. I want to explain. I've been every sort of beast to you."

"You have," said George. "I don't see how you can explain." But he did not ring off.

"Well, come along here," shouted Dick, "and I'll tell you. It's life and death, old man, and I can't come to you. I'm in Soho."

"Look here, Dick," said George in Hampstead, "I can't see any reason for turning out at this time of night to go to a man who's given me the cold shoulder for months. If you want to explain why you've done so, I'll be glad to see you here. Perhaps it does n't occur to you that it's just as easy for you to take a cab to Hampstead as it is for me to take one to Soho; if that's what you said."

"I can't come," cried Dick; "I've got to stay here. She might slip out. I'm not sure enough of her to leave the hotel."

"Who the devil are you talking about?" asked George from Hampstead. "And what hotel are you in?"

"Lothinga's Hotel in Illyria Street, Soho," Dick said. "Doll's here and she wants to see you."

"What?"

"I said your wife's here and she wants to see you. She wants to come back to you. She's left her mother and she's all alone and she wants *you*."

At this point the exchange disconnected them. Followed an interval of madness. At last George's voice again reached Dick's ears. It was screaming to somebody that he had been cut off.

"George," said Dick.

"That you, Dick? Thank God! Oh, these fools! I say, where did you say she is?"

Dick repeated his directions; then, satisfied that George was on his way, he left the box, and taking a chair in the hall, lit a cigar and composed himself to await his friend's arrival.

(5)

George was at Lothinga's Hotel within the half-hour. He came in running, his face transfigured. Dick, as their hands met, noted grey hair about his temples which he had never seen before and his heart smote him for the hate he had borne this dear man; but it exulted at the thought of the coming reparation.

"Where is she?" were George's first words.

Dick laughed. "Gone to bed," he said, "long ago. She's asleep by now, I should n't wonder."

George's face fell and his brow grew thunderous. "You said she wanted me," he cried.

"You ass," said Dick. "Did you think she knew you were coming? Why, my dear lad, I've been strictly forbidden so much as to mention your name to her."

"Look here, Dick," said George irritably, "I did n't come here for your entertainment, you know. I'd be glad if you'll explain —"

"Well," said Dick with a grin, "you're a fine, loving husband, are n't you? Don't you think Doll's the best person to ask for explanations? Don't you think you're rather wasting your time with me, old man?"

George, still puzzled, looked at him searchingly.

"You swear," he said, "that she wants me."

"I swear," said Dick.

"Then why does n't she come back?" cried George.
"She's only got to come —"

"That's just it," said Dick, "and her pride won't let her. She's just dying for you, but she thinks she's done for herself with you for good and all by going off with that poor old painted mother of hers. She's afraid to go back to you lest you should n't *take* her back. All damned pride! Damned folly, I call it. It seems I know you best, after all, Georgie. I knew you were n't —"

"Where's her room?" George interrupted fiercely.
"Take me up to her. Where's her room, I say?" He ran to the window of Mrs. Lothinga's office and demanded,
"What's Mrs. March's number?"

Mrs. Lothinga, who, though her eyes had been busy with these two excited young men who stood wrangling apparently just inside her front door, had never once left off knitting, looked up at him mildly. "Dere ain't no Mrs. March at all here," she informed him.

"Miss Washington," suggested Dick, to whom Doll had confided her Stage name. "This is Miss Washington's husband, Mrs. Lothinga. He wants to see her. Mr. March, Mrs. Lothinga."

"How know I," she enquired wisely, "dot she him to see wants? That he send to her his name."

"No," cried George. "Damn it! I *will* see her. I can't wait."

"But," said Mrs. Lothinga, "you shall wait, however, or I the policeman summons."

"Mrs. Lothinga," said Dick, "we're friends of Miss Robson — of Judd's. She's been finding Miss Washington — that is — Mrs. March — for us. There's been a horrible mistake, and Mr. March wants to clear it all up now, at once."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Lothinga, "you are friends of that angel. Then is there a difference. But myself I shall come along. And if this young lady says yes, then shall he see her. But there shall no disturbants be in the passages. My hotel is respectable. But just will I my row finish." Deliberately she completed the number of her stitches, deliberately she rolled off her stool, deliberately she waddled to the lift, preceded them into it.

"Fifteen," she said, and they went up. Then they were at last outside Doll's room. "And now," said Mrs. Lothinga, "let him declare himself, but there is to be in the passages no disturbants. My hotel is respectable."

They could hear Doll moving about in the room.

George knocked. "Doll," he called softly.

At once, behind the door, there was perfect silence.

"Doll," George repeated. "It's me, George. I want to come in."

They heard a little cry in the room. Then Doll's voice spoke. "George!" she said. "Oh!"

"Sweetheart," called George. "Let me in. Dick's given you away. I've come to take you home."

Inside the room there was a rush; the key rattled in the lock. "Oh!" she cried impatiently, "I can't get this old key to work."

Mrs. Lothinga tapped Dick on the arm. "We shall again go down," she said seriously. "We are not needful here." They turned away and began their return journey to the lift.

"Take it easy," cried George. "There's no hurry now."

Dick, looking back at the corner of the passage, saw the door fly open and George dart into the room. He heaved a great sigh of relief and raised his arms as if he put something away from him. "God!" he said, "I feel clean again."

Then he ran after Mrs. Lothinga.

(6)

The door as it opened revealed Doll, standing there. She wore her street coat for dressing-gown. Her lovely hair was all screwed back and up, away from her face, and all over her head were little tight knots of it, secured by pinned ribbons. Her nose was thickly covered with some white stuff, like a clown's, and her whole face shone with grease. She looked as ugly as you can well imagine.

George had never seen her thus. Nor did he now. He only saw Doll, Doll with her arms spread wide for him, Doll with the light of utter gladness in her eyes, Doll with her sweet lips parted to breathe his name.

"Doll!" he said.

Then he ran forwards and joy came to them, never to go away.

CHAPTER XXIX

(1)

THE story is wound up, but one is conscious of certain loose threads that stick out, here and there, and might be the better of a little trimming and tucking in. It is unfortunate that at this time of day a writer should find himself compelled to resort to a dodge so perfectly discredited, so essentially mid-Victorian as this. But some stories have a confoundedly bad trick of writing themselves regardless of the struggles of Technique to keep them abreast of the Fashion, and this story, it appears, was one of them. I apologise, then, for what has happened; I cry your mercy on my failure to tell my tale in the way which you have learned to believe is the only right one; but I refuse to leave my poor little Mrs. Brackett sobbing her poor little heart out on her sofa forever with the virtuous denunciations of Sir Richard Crewe, ex-villain (by two minutes), ringing forever in her ears. Her sins are undoubtedly great, but about such a punishment there would be a thoroughness for which life, as we lead it, does not provide.

Hate cannot dwell where happy Love has made its home, and the inevitable consequence of Doll's renewed contentment was the rapid disappearance of that fierce hostility which her mother had aroused within her. Doll could not be unkind, once her own troubles had been removed; for to a generous spirit, it is impossible to nurse wrath against an abject enemy. Mrs. Brackett's influ-

ence was gone forever; but a life's memory, for a time blotted out, of loving care and unfailing indulgence soon returned to plead for her, every day more strongly, more successfully, with the soft heart whose restored happiness made it every day less capable of resistance.

(2)

Even while she rushed out to Hampstead in the motor-cab, — half an hour had been long enough (George helping) to get her out of Lothinga's Hotel, — with her head on George's shoulder and her body in George's arm, and all her woes forgotten and left behind her (as were her little new suitcase and her new nightgown and new hair-brush and all the rest of her latest purchases) in bedroom number fifteen, — even then she had begun to relent and the thought of her mother's fear for her had suggested to her that a message of some kind must be sent.

"George," she whispered, "I've got to let mother know. She must be wild with anxiety about me by now. She can never have thought that I would n't come back."

"Let's go to Putney," he suggested at once.

"No," she said, "I can't see her to-night. Not to-night, George. I'm not going to spoil it for us that way, while there are messenger-boys to be had. Where's a depot?"

George told the driver to turn back — they were already halfway home — and soon Doll was writing her letter. It was thus conceived: —

Dear Mother, —

This is just to tell you that I'm quite safe and happy. I've gone back to George and I'm going to stay there.

DOLL.

P.S. I have 'come alive' at last.

It might have been a little kinder, but Doll had much to forgive and to forget. That the letter was sent that night at all was, I think, quite kind enough.

This duty accomplished they resumed their journey to Hampstead.

Let me record Doll's surprise and delight when she got out of the cab. While George paid the driver she stood looking about her, at first wonderingly, then as she realised where she was, a sort of rapture grew in her face.

"Why, George," she cried, as the cab drove away, "it's the old house. You've left The Lawn?"

"That's what's happened," he said. "I could n't stay there without you."

"But," she said, "it's too lovely for any use! Do you know, all the way I've been dreading The Lawn. Hateful place! I never want to see it again. Oh," she cried, "let's go in. I'm wild to go in."

The house door opened and a woman was silhouetted against the lit hall. "That you, Master George?" she asked.

Doll gave a little scream. "Mary!" she exclaimed, running forward. "Mary Bates. You've got her back again, George. Oh! I've got to hug her." To Mary's unmeasured surprise and indignation she found herself being embraced and patted by the young woman for whom of all the world she had the sincerest dislike. But her hostility quickly passed away under the influence of Doll's unaffected gladness to see her. "Mary," she said as she released the bristling old woman, "I was the hatefulest and meanest thing to you; but if you don't forgive me I shall just lie down and die of a broken heart. I'm good again, Mary, and I'm never going to be bad any more. Master

George has forgiven me and you must do it, too. It would be most disrespectful in her not to, would n't it, George? And you may just as well do it now, Mary, because you'll have to do it sooner or later, for I'm not going to let you go away, ever again. So be a kind, dear Mary and cook us up a little supper to celebrate my coming home. I could n't eat any dinner and I'm crazy to eat something. And have you any champagne left, George?"

Mary produced champagne (as that remarkable woman could produce anything), and the supper she 'cooked up' was a miracle of excellence, or so it appeared to the two people who ate it. Doll, to keep herself from crying, talked nonsense incessantly; George said almost nothing, but sat and gloated upon her with eyes that hardly moved.

"Oh!" she cried presently, "but it's good to be back in this dear little house of ours again. No more Lawns for mine. This is good enough. And you're going to see how clever and careful I've learned to be since — since we last met, George. Why, I'll have those hateful old debts paid off in no time. There's going to be such a reign of economy in this house as never was. I'll buy a book on it to-morrow and that's the last thing I'll buy till we're clear. And you're to give me no more flowers and no more candy. And we'll travel on the Tube. And I'm going to make all my own clothes right out of sackcloth and ashes."

"And no motor-car?" said George with a grin.

"Don't you dare," she cried, "to say that word to me. I never want to see an automobile again."

"Until the debts are paid, eh?" he asked.

"No, sir, never! I'm going to *walk*. I'll get a real strong pair of sporting boots and defy the bad weather. They'll only cost twelve dollars."

"Better have two pairs," he said. "They'll both last longer. That's economy, you know."

"Well," she said, "that's so. Yes, I'll get two pairs. One tan leather and one to be greased. Greased boots look dandy if they're well made, George."

He laughed. "The debts are all paid," he said. "I had a legacy. They're all paid, Doll. You can have a dozen pairs of boots, if you like."

When she had assimilated this joyful intelligence he went on: "So I expect we'd better order that car to-morrow. What do you say?"

"I say, no," she said firmly. "I've got to be punished somehow; and that's how. I *won't* have a car, George. At least for a whole year."

"Oh, come!" he protested. "Say three months."

She met his eye and looked away again guiltily.

"Six," she said, pouting adorably. "But it must be a very little one."

"If you'll say 'three,'" he replied, "I'll make it a two-seater. Just room for you and me, Doll."

She pouted again, more adorably.

"I don't seem," she said with a sigh, "to be going to be allowed to be punished at all. Is n't it too bad?"

"Come into the big chair," he said as he got up from the table. "And we'll imagine ourselves in that two-seater. I'll take you all round the Chilterns. I went some great drives there with Otis in the winter."

"I don't believe," she said, as she snuggled down upon his knees, — "I don't believe you've missed me one little

bit. You've really been ever so happy with your Otis and your Mary Bates and your old legacy."

"Hush," he said, "we're off. Don't talk or you'll stop the car. Bow-wow!" he grunted like a motor-horn. Then he caught her to him suddenly.

(3)

Mrs. Brackett arrived (via The Lawn and the Post-Office) next morning about nine o'clock. Fortunately Doll and George, anticipating something of the sort, were just sitting down to breakfast when she was announced.

But what these three people said to one another on this occasion needs not to be reported. Any unconditional surrender is painful even to the victor, if he be not devoid of humanity; how much more so must such an event be to persons like ourselves, whose individual happiness is in no way affected by it. It is enough that Mrs. Brackett abased herself utterly and that Doll and George were moved to compassion — almost to tears — by her misery. But the injury was too recent for anything like a reconciliation to be effected. Doll had acquired a sort of horror of her mother which could not be removed in a moment. As for George, his winter of affliction had not long enough been over for him to look calmly upon the source of his unhappiness. It was an uncomfortable and unsatisfactory interview, and they parted without achieving any result upon which they could congratulate themselves. But Mrs. Brackett, though she knew she had failed, was not defeated. She came no more to Hampstead, but she began, and continued, to write letters both to Doll and to George which ultimately procured for her their tolerance,

if not the restoration of their affection and trust. It is impossible to resist very long-continued appeals for forgiveness, unless one is a person of an adamantine will and an inhuman sense of justice; and neither Doll nor George remotely resembled such a monster. They were ordinary, warm-hearted creatures, anxious to be on good terms with all the world, and as day by day their troubles receded farther and farther into the past and as day by day their new love for one another gained in strength and sweetness, there seemed less and less room for the nourishment of grudges and dislikes and for the refusal of the forgiveness which, day after day, they were entreated to bestow.

And so it came about that Mrs. Brackett, without any definite scene of reconciliation having been enacted, once more became a visitor at their house. Her sting was drawn and she could do them no harm; on the other hand, it was obviously a wonderful privilege for her to be allowed to come. Her gratitude, when first she came, on invitation, to lunch, was almost overpowering, but once it had been expressed, she never again spoke of it. Wise with the wisdom that those learn who live on sufferance, she perceived that any such attitude was calculated not only to embarrass her hosts, but also to revive in their memories certain facts which she desired earnestly to be obliterated. Henceforward she was bright, smiling, tender, amusing — anything but grateful. Gradually it became a rule established that she should lunch with them on Tuesdays, and this rule was always, when Doll and George were in London, scrupulously adhered to. They seemed, in this way, to have arrived at a compromise tolerable for each side to the bargain; and as time went on this compromise became actually agreeable. For

Mrs. Brackett changed, as I dare say they all changed. She grew softer, gentler, less humble, more content with her position. Doll's love she won back almost completely, but only because she never for a moment attempted to win back her dominance. George also grew to like her quite well. At last he even forgot himself so greatly as to call her 'mommer' one day; and Mrs. Brackett now grasped at the name and insisted upon its use. She referred to herself regularly as 'mommer' until the custom was unshakably established among them; and by that time she had got into the way of doing it and she never got out.

Even Dick Crewe uses the name when he meets her, as he sometimes does, at lunch on a Tuesday. But Dick is one of the family and a privileged person.

THE END

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